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JOHN WINTERBOURNE'S FAMILY

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BY
ALICE BROWN



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1910

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Published October 1910

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I

THE old Winterbourne house, one of New England's ancientry, stood at the west end of Clyde, among other noble structures of an equal age, some of them surrounded by spacious grounds and looking out at the back upon fields sloping down to the Sutton River. Across the river was Sutton itself, a dozing village. Clyde was dignified, reminiscent of more formal customs, and yet tolerant. A few of its estates had reached an admirable degree of cultivation, with terraces, peony-topped, and arbors, grape-entwined. These soberly attested the prosperity of owners who, sharing in some fashion the financial life of the day, perhaps went to the city every morning, and returned at night to the conventional repose of a proper establishment. Others of the old houses, belonging still to the best families, stayed as they had been twenty or more years ago, in an untended ease. The shrubs grew, reached their limit, and were allowed to decline into a natural state. The perennials in green-lichened gardens ran out and were not renewed. This was usually when women-folk had inherited and acquiesced in the unchanged state of things as they had been when there was an active head of the house, they, in their undefended state, being too weak to cope with gardeners.

The Winterbourne mansion, large, with a beautiful line of gambrel roof, had been vacant, save for one pensioner, for ten

years and over, and had fallen into disrepair, though every last thing that happened to it seemed only, in the unpractical eye, to augment its charm. The shingles, lichen-gray and curled like lichens, let the water through to the rotting roof, and that again transferred the ignominy of dark brown streaks and patches to the ceilings: so that Lydia Pendleton, the old servitor who had lived with the Winterbournes of three generations and now lodged rent-free in the house, made it a part of her duty, in northeast storms, to set pans all over the attic floor to catch the drip. The walls cried for paint, the blinds were racked and some of them yawning, and the repairs needed without would have caused the heart of the carpenter to leap for ecstasy. But to the eye in search of beauty only, of that rich mellowness, the child of time, it was a lovely house, shaded by trees, overgrown of vines, and with never a line in all its leaf-embowered amplitude which was not obedient to art.

Three years ago, John Winterbourne, the owner, and last wearer of his name, had come home and settled down here with only Lyddy to make his household. He was between forty and fifty, a man who, without active choice of his own, had lived a varied life, putting a finger — or the whole hand, according to his impetuous way — into cloth and paper, and even the printing of books, chiefly because work was not done well enough, he thought, and the time needed his irascible service to set it right, and withdrawing from trade suddenly and petulantly also, it seemed, to this tangled retreat and the slovenly ministrations of Lyddy, who had so long considered the house her own shell that she hardly remembered how to vary her eccentric system of work for anybody else, even a revered Winterbourne. He was satisfied. So he was telling James Trenton Lovell, his chum after a fashion, on a night in March when they sat together by the fire in the great square

east room, which had, in this light, a stately and satisfying aspect. The paint—a great deal of it on wainscoting and panels—had turned to a fine ivory. What paper there was, an old French design of castles and lovers and huntresses, showed a perfect degree of preservation, and led the eye round the walls through changing vistas of soft blue cloud and castellated height. The furniture was faithful to a by-gone year when the house was built, — dark-hued, spindle-legged, some of it rich in carving and inlaid borders. All that daylight could disclose, the subtle look of long neglect, the dusk hid gracefully, and the firelight, playing over the picture as if it were honorably worth disclosing, touched it with a sombre charm.

The two men before the fire sat there with a little table between them, on it a black book and an unlighted lamp. The book was the *Idyls of Theocritus*. John Winterbourne was a scholar of richer equipment than his friend, and he was accustomed to sit here and read Greek aloud, while Lovell, with a frowning brow and great excitement, followed from another copy.

Winterbourne was a great fellow, broad-shouldered, shaggy, with brown, gray-streaked hair and beard, deep lines in his forehead, and astonishing eyes set under bushy brows. They were dark eyes, sometimes hazel, often a soft brown; but it was the things they did that were amazing. They found so many subjects in the world to be angry with that they flashed and stared the unworthy down; but children, as the four in an equally shabby house at the other end of the village could have told, found them inviting, merry, full of light. He was dressed like a workman of some unpretending sort, in dark trousers and coat and a blue flannel shirt with a collar rolling away under his thick beard. His hand was a workman's hand, square, with fingers blunted at the end, the

sort that do things delicately, and with a fine network of muscle on the lean brown back of them. As he sat idle now, poring over the fire, they were folded before him in a supple strength.

Jim Lovell, his friend was called in every-day usage, though when he had served as consul in an Italian town and been returned under some stigma of incapacity, his three-sectioned name was the one the papers bruited. He was really a man in middle youth, yet from some nervous lack of adaptability to the world, a way of refusing its conventional favors, a timidity in the face of civilization, an ungracious yet involuntary way of rebuffing the kindest offices if they brought mortal man too near, he seemed to be not more than a decade behind his friend. He was of a sanguine type, with thick hair very much alive brushed back from his forehead in a crown, quick gray eyes like a wood-creature's in their mobile seeking, a big nose and a very desirable mouth. When he had a mother and sister to comment admiringly on his beautiful mouth, his square chin with the dimple in it, and the slenderness of his neck, he used to wear a beard; it defended him from that terrifying certainty of being out in the world with woman's eyes. But now his immediate women-kind were dead, and as nobody praised him into panic, he forgot some of his timidities and went shaven because he felt cleaner so.

Winterbourne was speaking in his musing bass, looking with an extreme content into the fire, as if it carried his eyes farther yet to what is beyond the fire and beyond the world.

"This life suits me, Jim. If I could have my two meals as Lyddy gives 'em to me, and my pipe, and my plunge off the wharf, and a book and a fire, I could live forever and not sicken."

Lovell looked round at him with a nod. He did not al-

together agree. He had not his friend's type of robust health, though when he kept the rules he was in a splendid poise of being; but he knew the more delicate variations of nervous life. He was accustomed to fears of the unsubstantial which we call fate or fortune; he knew the black days when we rise to an unfriendly world and creep shuddering to bed again, under the dominion of an organization too subtly poised. But these things he had taught himself to consider his destined enemies, as actual a part of his burden of life as if he had been born with defective senses. At last, in his late twenties, after suffering hideously from the uneasy certainty that life is a menace to the soul, forever pushing it toward that uncomprehended variation we call death, he had decided to let his brain rule him and not his fleeting emotions. So now he never betrayed his fears and heart-sicknesses, nor owned to them within himself.

"Yes," he said, with that brief nod, "it's a good life."

Winterbourne lighted the lamp with deftness, and then put out a hand to the book.

"Ready?" he inquired.

"Any time."

Winterbourne rose, and was taking a match from the mantel safe, when there came a thin, jangling ring at the side door. He listened an instant, frowning.

"What fool is that," he inquired, "coming in here to upset our work?"

Lovell also listened. This extreme miserliness over their sober comfort embroidered with the imagery of Theocritus made them look ludicrously, each to the other, as if they were in a state of siege. Winterbourne saw it, and laughed loudly. The sound ran out into the hall and over the house. It might have come from some shaggy-hided satyr in the woods, the volume of it was so rough and uncontrolled.

"I'll answer it," he said. "Lyddy's gone to bed and sleep. She never hears anything when she's off this floor; she wouldn't come if she did."

He struck the match, lighted an untidy candle in a noble-shaped candlestick on the mantel, and strode with it into the hall. As he opened the door, a gust swept in, a wind risen not an hour ago. When he had settled himself by his fire that night it had been still and cold, and now the sudden tempest surprised him so that he glanced up to see if the stars were there and ask them what they thought about it. The stars were there, glittering in the dark, so surprisingly splendid that in looking at them he forgot to guard his candle, and the gust put it out. Winterbourne was a man of quick rages over small things. He gave himself up to them promptly, even when he felt them coming; it was a species of luxury where the blood moved fast and you could say what you liked, and exercise the savage man in you. Instantly he was furious with the candle, but before he could show it, a miserable voice, a woman's, half-conciliatory, half-impudent, as if she had primed herself for a speech she dreaded, rose from the step below him.

"Mr. Winterbourne, Cousin Lyddy Pendleton said you had an ear-trumpet."

Winterbourne was recalled from the stars and his erring candle. He frowned down upon a small figure beneath his level; with the wind blowing its shawl, it seemed to be composed of wisps and tatters.

"Do you come here to-night routing me out of my sleep to ask me if I've got an ear-trumpet?" he rolled out at her.

Lovell, within, hearing the tone, wondered at it, it seemed so to fit the loftiest passages of the rhythmic Greek. He could not but speculate on any call from the outer world that evoked so grand a declamation.

"Woman!" ended Winterbourne. That he had added with a large simplicity. He did not know her name, and the title seemed to him permissible.

"Mercy!" said she, "I did n't think you'd be abed as early as this."

"I'm not abed," Winterbourne declaimed, and she was silent, not feeling at liberty to tell him that he had just offered something pointing that way.

"Well," said he, "do you want to see Lyddy?"

"No, sir," she returned in haste, that being the last possibility to be considered. "I wouldn't see her for anything in the world. Lyddy's mother's cousin. They don't speak."

"You need n't come here with your wars and rumors of wars," said Winterbourne. "Lyddy's all right."

"Mebbe she is. Mother's been terrible tryin', I know. But what I meant was, if they'd been speakin' I'd done it through Lyddy."

"Woman!" said Winterbourne again, liking the sound of it as a mouth-filling word. Then he remembered Poe incidentally and that it had been a tempestuous night when he also had a mysterious visitant. — "'Thing of evil,'" he added, in his way of trusting to dull brains to lag behind him, and not caring really whether they did or not, so that he enjoyed the exercise of lingual vagaries, "do you want to leave Lyddy a message? Is that it?"

"No, sir," she returned earnestly. "I just wanted to know whether you'd got an ear-trumpet."

"Well, then, I have," said Winterbourne. "Now what have you got to say?"

She seemed to break up in a panic of nervous apprehension.

"O Mr. Winterbourne," she said, and between her trepidation and the chill of the wind her teeth chattered,

"mother has n't heard a word for 'most nine years. That is, except we scream. Then she can, when there ain't too much noise. Ever so long ago Lyddy told mother you'd made a trumpet, an' she was goin' to borrow it an' see if mother could use it; an' then she an' mother fell out, so of course we could n't accept it of her. But now we're goin' to move to Sacker's Falls—we're goin' right off this week—an' Lyddy could n't help herself if I come to you. So I come to ask you about your trumpet."

Winterbourne stood before her in silence, and if she had known him in the least she would have seen that a mingling tide—anger at her because she was out in the cold on such an idiotically chosen night, an unwilling sympathy for her mother who, he felt, might have remained deaf in seclusion without sending here to waken his futile sorrow, and plain disgust because people always did choose such incorrect ways of doing business—all this had swept him to the rostrum where he was likely to break out terrifically. But while he waited, bottling his wrath, she spoke again, in trembling.

"You see, Mr. Winterbourne, we heard 'twas so elegant we knew 't would be a high price, an' we could n't afford to put much money into it,—an' perhaps not any before another winter,—an' we could n't do it at all unless we were pretty sure 't would work. So what I wanted to ask you, Mr. Winterbourne, was if you knew anybody that had used it, or if you was deaf yourself."

Winterbourne opened his lips and emitted an exasperated baby roar, not at all tempered by the nearness of his listener. As it left his lips, he was aware that she was turning, and before he had fairly added, in an exasperated cry, "Great Jupiter, woman, do I look as if I was deaf?" she had melted away into the dark. He stood there a moment, looking into the void of whirling dust, and then, leaving the door still

wide, plunged back into the house, rattled at the obstinate drawer of a table, and fled out after her.

Lovell, trying to resume his interrupted quietude at the hearth, was forced awake to the fact that the entering wind was chilling his ankles, and heard his friend go dashing away, down the street, calling something as he ran. Lovell thought of closing the door, but as all temperatures were more or less the same to him in his habitude of open-air life, he merely put his feet up on the fire dogs, returned to the consideration of Theocritus, and waited.

It was ten minutes or more before Winterbourne was back again, blown and muttering. He slammed the door shut, and came in to his interrupted tranquillity. While he turned up the wick and got open his books, Lovell waited; then he said, with only a casual interest, —

“What was it, Winterbourne?”

Winterbourne was eyeing his pipe waiting for him on the table, as if he had a mind to smoke instead of reading.

“It was a damned woman,” he said absently, “that wanted an ear-trumpet for another totally condemned and pestiferous woman that happens to be her mother.”

“Oh!”

“She lost her temper,” said Winterbourne, with innocence. “What for, I could n’t see. I’d been patient with her, though she was enough to drive a quiet man to hanging. So she took herself off in the sulks, and I had to pelt after her and give her a trumpet.”

“You did n’t give her a trumpet, John?” Lovell looked more awake than he commonly did over any but things of immortal value, like poetry and the gods.

“Yes. I told you so.”

“Now what do you want to bat round over the country giving folks trumpets for? How many do you own anyway?”

"What?"

"Ear-trumpets."

Winterbourne was turning the leaves of his book, with an absorption all anticipated pleasure. His rugged face cleared of lines. He looked as if he had found at last the most enchanting game,—one, though he had played it long enough to gauge its perfections fully, gay with the surprise of first encounter.

"Two, that's all," said he. "This and the one I gave you. That's on your mantelpiece, if I remember."

Then they both laughed. They were thinking how their renewed acquaintance had begun. Winterbourne, coming back to Clyde, had asked some welcoming old lady, the parson's wife, maybe, about the son of his friend Lovell, and the old lady had told him, with much concern, that young Lovell was unhappily shut off from his kind. He was very deaf. So, trumpet in hand, Winterbourne had sought him out, and Jim was at first amazed, then touched by the kindness of it—and they had left the trumpet on the mantel.

"But it is n't on the mantel now," said Lovell. "It's in that little cupboard overhead. I'll tell you in case you want it in a hurry. Don't give it away, Winterbourne. You don't want to send it flying round Robin Hood's barn if you're ever going to patent it."

"I'm not going to patent it. I'm not going to have anything to do with their infernal modern scheming to get themselves booked for Tophet."

"That is n't what a patent does," said Lovell patiently. "You know that, you violent old party."

Winterbourne looked up at him with a quarrelsome mien. Why should all this, it asked persistently, keep him from his book?

"I wish you'd stop talking ear-trumpets," he said.

"Well, so long as you've invented it," Lovell ventured a pace further, "the next step is a patent, if you want to get it into circulation; and you do or you wouldn't be so fly with it the minute you hear anybody's deaf."

"That's because I'm a born fool," Winterbourne responded. "I take their word for it. They want to hear, and I weakly pass 'em out a trumpet. I know it is n't best for 'em to hear. I know there is n't a syllable uttered from morning till night in this derelict old world that's worth hearing—"

"It was you that invented it."

"I did that for my mother. She wanted to hear, too, poor old dear. They bought her a trumpet, and it buzzed infernally. So I got busy and made this, and I called it pan-pipes and told her her clever son hatched it up for her. And she loved it, and when she mislaid it for a week, I had to make her another or she'd have died of grief. And she's gone, and the trumpets are here, and if anybody with deaf ears wants 'em they may have 'em and go hang. I don't take dirty money for 'em, do I? Ready?"

But while they poised on the point of entrance into the world that looked to them every night fresh created, they were plucked rudely back. The outer door opened, and a young man came in. At the clicking of the latch Winterbourne had raised his leonine head with an angry shake and opened his mouth to the roar that served him as protest against a meddling world. But meeting the young man's gaze, taking in the familiar pleasantness of his tall figure, the clothes that always brought a scent of outer air, anger died in him, and he nodded, in easy salutation.

This was Dwight Hunter, who, left alone with no blood-connections, lived by himself on the outskirts of the town, a mile farther on, and pursued varied occupations of an outdoor life together calculated to relieve him from the neces-

sity of going into the city on an early train and sitting at a desk, or adopting other sophistical occupations which his most respectable position would seem to entail upon him. He was working and playing with these two older men because they had recognized him as one of their own kind, and prized him accurately. Perhaps, too, their solitary life gave color and suggestion for his own. Because Lovell lodged alone in a small house slightly removed from the large one where he and his mother and sister had lived together, Hunter found it easier to assume that as the natural way of conducting bachelorhood when there were no women-folk. So Mary Manahan plied back and forth between him and Lovell, doing them daily service and keeping their domestic timepieces clicking in a desultory way. At first young ladies matrimonially floating, some of whom had been Hunter's schoolmates, thought it "ridiculous" that he should be living so, in an out-at-elbows fashion; their mothers even ventured gently to persuade him it would never do. But he was an obstinate young man, of terse address, and it was difficult to enter, uninvited, the arena of discussion with him; and as no eccentricity was debated upon for long in Clyde, ladies and their daughters retired presently to their customary well-bred repose, and Hunter, though he was thought no less of, was recognized as having plunged over the boundary of the deplorably unconventional, and given his head to gallop there.

He came forward into the circle of lamplight, and halted, cap in hand, the attitude of easy grace adopted not because they were his elders but because he was born to an instinctive courtesy. He was ripe for life, brown-eyed, brown-haired, warm-colored, with teeth ready for beautiful laughter, and a freshness of skin that spoke of the wind and the sun. The two men looking at him had the same thought—that he

belonged to the days of heavenly eld shut in there between the dark covers of their book, and released for a while to run these meadows, and, an alien presence, tread these streets to show the world what was when Greece was young. Winterbourne wakened first from the dream. He laughed out.

"Where's Bacchus, Hunter?" he inquired. "Where's Pan? You left 'em outside, did n't you, boy?"

Hunter smiled back. He knew the gods by name and all their following, but he had no present use for them. They seemed to him to belong to schoolmasters and men elderly enough to like to rest their stiffening legs by the fire in the evening, and roll out poetry, and potter over what other men had achieved in open air.

"I've put ten loads on the lower end of the field," he offered. "Now you said something about ploughing up round the house, so I did it. I've ploughed within ten feet. But you don't want the carrots up round the house, do you? Shan't I lay it down to lawn-grass?"

Winterbourne looked at him with the mild obstinacy of a man who, having entered an unfamiliar occupation, sees no way to preserve his courage in it but by keeping an inflexible front.

"I want it all sowed down to carrots," he said. "Summer carrots. Do you sow 'em broadcast, Hunter?"

The young man's face twisted for an instant and his eyes shone, but he answered with a perfect gravity, —

"No, Mr. Winterbourne. We sow 'em in drills. They have to be in rows, you know, so you can get the wheel-hoe between 'em."

Winterbourne nodded.

"I want," said he magnificently, as if he were demanding some largess of the powers, "I want as many carrots on this place as you can crowd in and leave me room to step. I

want carrots up to the front porch and down the walks. I want 'em climbing up the gutter-pipes—"

Hunter's eyes flashed again for an instant, but he remarked quietly, —

"They won't climb, Mr. Winterbourne. I can't guarantee anything there."

"Very well then," said Winterbourne, taking up his pipe and filling it in haste, as if he might get in a smoke edge-wise between this interview and his reading, "let 'em grovel then, the dunderheaded things. Let 'em run down till they're sick of it, when they might soar and wave. What do you say, Jim?"

Lovell roused himself from his frowning study of a page.

"Oh, yes," he said, "yes. I should do that. By all means do that."

The bell jangled peremptorily, and Winterbourne started to his feet, match lighted and pipe in hand.

"Hunter," he said silkily, "you go to the door for me, there's a good boy. If it's a woman that wants an ear-trumpet for a deaf parent, you tell her they're all given out for the day. The supply's exhausted. Bank's closed."

Hunter stepped into the hall. He had a soft, light way of moving, as if his muscles gave him pleasure, and the more gayly they carried their loads, the greater the fun. Presently, after a short colloquy, he was back again, a letter in hand.

"Special delivery," he said, and gave Winterbourne the letter.

Winterbourne, taking it, regarded it gravely and with some mistrust, as if it might be a document of a sort for which he was unprepared.

"Oh," he said, and slipped it into his pocket. "Sit down, Hunter. We might as well plan about to-morrow. Lovell, wake up. Going clamming in the morning?"

Lovell closed his book on one thumb and did look up, the misty light of his eyes gradually clearing as the sense of the necessities of things throbbed back into them and pushed the dreams away.

"What time 's tide?" he inquired.

"Low tide at five," said Hunter. He had perched, seeming to sit but giving no weight to it, on the back of an arm-chair at a greater distance from the fire. "I've got boots and the whole kit down in my shanty. I can make coffee there, if you don't want to rout Lyddy out."

"I never want to," said Winterbourne. "Lyddy is in the sere, where, if I treat her handsome, she'll stay till she's a hundred and ten. But she's got to be treated handsome, or she'll slip her cable and be off."

"All right," said Hunter. "You be there by four and I'll have the grub."

The three of them paused a moment then, all looking at the fire and gravely considering whether there were more preliminaries before they should part. Then Winterbourne, as if he wanted to include Hunter in the bond of their fellowship, delivered himself of the sentiment that had begun the evening.

"It's a good life, Hunter."

Hunter nodded.

"Suits me," he replied briefly.

"You see," Winterbourne continued, bringing out a line of thought he had presented to them many a time before, "we live in a dangerous hour. There are enemies all about us, banks and stock exchanges, labor-unions and trusts. They are bent on killing the soul. If we are going to exist at all, my boys, we've got to build up some occupation for ourselves that gets us our bread out of the old earth. What say, Jim?"

Lovell had not spoken, but he was really wondering, as he often did, in moments when he was not actually reading the poets, whether it did pay to live at all. This Winterbourne seemed to surprise in him, and plucked it out of its breeding-ground by a familiarity with his thought. Lovell had not spoken, but Winterbourne took up his thought as if he had uttered it.

"We've talked that all out, Lovell. It's settled. It's a good thing, life is. We've spoiled it, some of us for ourselves, and a scurvy lot of them for other people. But it's a good thing, ain't it, Hunter?"

When Winterbourne felt closely in touch with his kind, he alloyed his verbs with local usage, and felt it brought him nearer.

"I'm all right," said Hunter generously, as if that were his contributory vote.

"We're all of us all right if we work with our hands and get calloused and hungry. Now I calculate there are three occupations that would support a man in this neighborhood without his having to descend to the degradation of living on money out at interest. He can plant carrots. That I'm going to do. He can go clamming. That I have done. He can buy lobsters fresh from the pots, and peddle them round the country-side. That I shall do. If I choose, I shall learn to make baskets, and dispense them at summer hotels. I assume that I shall lead a perfectly useful and innocent life in the midst of simple occupations, and when I die the earth will receive me hospitably. She'll remember how much she's done for me and like me the better for it."

Hunter was fixing him with a bright, awakened look.

"You know, Mr. Winterbourne," he said, "if you want money, you can patent your ear-trumpet."

Winterbourne got out of his chair, took the pipe from

his mouth, and with the other hand lifted the poker in a menace.

"Go home, boy," said he. "Go right home now. I could split you from nave to chine, and I will if you bring any of your devil's temptations here."

Hunter laughed, and got off the chair.

"Yes, I'm going," he said. "But it's a fact. If you don't patent it somebody else will, and you'll like that, won't you?"

Winterbourne advanced on him with the poker.

"Go home," said he.

"I wish I could see the thing. Lyddy told me about it. She's got a deaf cousin she hates like poison, and it threw her into a holy calm to know there was a trumpet and a cousin that could n't get it."

"There's one of 'em down at my place," said Lovell, looking up: "I'll show it to you."

Hunter was really going now.

"Four o'clock," he called back to them from the outer door. "Four sharp."

The door closed on him, and then Winterbourne, laughing softly, put down the poker. He shook his pipe out into the fire, and laid it on the mantel, with the gentle care of the devoted smoker. There he stood for a moment, thinking.

"I guess," he said, as if he had thought of anything else since his mind had been playing on the surface of things, "I guess, Jim, I'll read my letter."

Lovell looked up from his book where he had been skimming a page with more than usual facility.

"Yes," he said, "of course. Read your letter."

Winterbourne was turning it over in his hand, looking at it with a curious tinge of apprehension.

"I will," he said. "It's from my wife."

II

LOVELL looked up through an interest which was reminding itself not to commit that last, worst offence, and overstep the bounds of curiosity, and therefore kept him from making more than the briefest monosyllabic "Oh!" This renewal of his knowledge of Winterbourne, a figure of hearsay among his elders even, had been of a man who had lived out of Clyde long enough to marry a wife, make their home in New York for a number of years, and then, in some unexplained fashion, determine to live apart from her. When Lovell got so far, as he did two or three times in the first days of their intimacy, he put the topic aside as one he had nothing to do with; and after that, looking at Winterbourne only through the medium of their kindred occupations, he never thought of it at all. But he was sure, calling upon his inner unconfirmed memory, that there was a wife living, and, he dimly thought, a grown-up child.

Winterbourne had run frowningly through the four closely written pages, and now stooped and laid the paper on the blaze. There was a finality in the act which made Lovell again wonder a little, briefly. It seemed a summary fate to inflict on a letter that had arrived with the haste of a special stamp. Winterbourne spoke again in a moved and gentle voice.

"She is coming here. She is coming home."

"When?" asked Lovell, shaking himself into a practical marching order of mind.

"To-night."

Lovell was getting out of his chair.

"I'll take myself off," he said.

Winterbourne put out a powerful hand, and appeared, by a touch on his shoulder, to be pushing him back.

"Don't," he counselled. He seemed really to be imploring a service. "She is coming on the last train. She does n't want me to meet her. She's telephoned for a carriage, she says. Stay with me till then, Jim."

It was, to Lovell's sensitive mind, although he was not used to clutching at subtleties of motive in every-day act, as if the other man anticipated an ordeal, and wanted companionship until the moment of his meeting it. They resumed their chairs, and Winterbourne, bending forward, took the tongs and touched the sticks into a blaze.

"I have n't seen her," he said, still in that moved voice, "for over four years."

It was one year more than he had been here leading his happy desultory life with the Greeks and his fond acquaintance with the earth.

"It's a long time," ventured Lovell, because that really seemed all there was to say.

"Yes." Then he mused a space, and broke out afresh. "You know she adopted a child, — we did, — a girl."

"I was n't sure. I rather thought there was a child."

"We never had one of our own. Catherine found this one when it was about eight. She wanted it. She had a kind of passion —" He broke off here and turned his direct gaze upon his friend. It seemed as if, with eyes so full of power, he could find out all he needed to know before asking; yet there was also a pathos of seeking in them. "I don't know how much you know, Lovell," he continued, "about modern women."

"I don't know anything at all," said Lovell violently.

His mind had not gone back so far as to summon his

mother and sister from the dim hall where they dwelt with lamps of adoration burning before them. They stood for something warm and kind, an ecstasy of well-wishing, and he dared not think of them often lest he should bring upon himself the turbulence of mind and body he knew as grief. All the women outside that circle of his affections he regarded with a horror of nervous distaste, as creatures who wanted to tell him how much they had enjoyed the volume of poems he had published years ago, as if the work were a dish for the table, and who, on the strength of it, meant to hale him to afternoon teas and to meet distinguished strangers.

"I don't know anything about modern women," he added hastily, as if a swift disclaimer might help in keeping them away.

"No," said Winterbourne, almost tenderly, remembering his secluded life, "you would n't. What we read here together does n't prepare us for 'em. There are n't any Helens — though there's a little of Helen, maybe, a very little, if you feel the charm. A little of Medea, a little of Electra — I can't pursue that. Well, my own wife, Lovell, had a passion for — I don't know what to call it — for being active, for living, for helping the world turn round."

Lovell nodded. He thought he understood. He was willing to pretend he did, for this unravelling, he saw, Winterbourne was not finding an easy task.

"Clubs?" he inquired, without looking up.

Winterbourne stared.

"Clubs? Oh, women's clubs. I guess so. All kinds of things that were active and had information in 'em. She brought up the girl to learn things and do things. I don't think the girl is having a good time."

"What's her name?" asked Lovell, because he felt it to

be friendly of him to show an interest, and this was the only question safe enough.

"Celia. I fancy she accounts for their coming. My wife writes there is something the matter with her."

Lovell grunted sympathy, and Winterbourne went on musing.

"She's a pretty girl, a striking girl. But she's not clever. Catherine wanted her to be. She had her trained in a great many subjects. I don't think she ever got very far in them. I don't think she's happy, as I said. She's had a feeling, I think, that she was a disappointment to my wife and that it seemed ungrateful —" He stopped, staring into the fire.

"Are you — attached to her?" Lovell inquired, out of his assumption of sympathy.

"I don't know."

"I suppose your wife is attached to her."

"Oh, very much. Very much. She's been Catherine's life-work. If Catherine could have played the fiddle, or dug up Egyptian jugs, or danced barefooted in beads and veils and things, I dare say she would n't have laid so much stress on Celia. You can't tell."

"How long is it since you have seen her — Celia?"

"Four years. Catherine took her abroad. She was to be trained for something or other there. Then they came back and something queer happened. Celia found her own sister."

"She'd been hunting for her?"

"No. It was quite by chance and very simple. The girl had been working in an ordinary place, — a country boarding-house, I think, — and in some way they met and found they were sisters, and Celia was n't to be separated from her."

"That was hard on your wife?" Lovell began tentatively.

"No. Catherine liked it. I think from her letters she

liked it. You see the sister had a voice. So it seemed to Catherine she could do some of the things with her she never 'd been able to do with Celia."

"What's the sister's name?"

Winterbourne thought for a moment.

"I don't recollect," he said.

"Haven't you ever seen her?"

"No. It all happened after my wife and Celia came back from Europe, — why, not more than six months ago. I 'd been living here."

The little break in the narrative covered the reason why he had begun living in Clyde while his wife careered about the world; but Lovell felt not even the mildest curiosity in further probing. It seemed to him that there was for Winterbourne, in the interval of waiting for family bonds to be welded again, something in being allowed to free his mind to one who would feel bound to forget it all next day.

"Well," he said, "I suppose your wife is running down to see you and leaving the" — He hesitated. To call them girls seemed too familiar to a sense of courtesy trained in Clyde, and the thin air of relationship forbade him to name them daughters. "She'll leave the others behind her?" he qualified.

"No," said Winterbourne. "They are coming too. She comes to-night, and Celia and —" He bent forward over the coals, as if they could give him back the name he had sacrificed — "What made me holocaust that letter? Well, Celia is coming and the other one, whatever they call her, in the morning."

Lovell was one who believed fully in the simplicity of daily life. He could drink from the spring and live for days on bread and apples, and the luxurious convenience of rich houses he scorned as contributing to the lax fibre of the

men corrupted by them. But even he wondered at seeing Winterbourne sitting there, hands folded, feet at rest, before the coals, while exacting femininity was nearing this ramshackle house fit only for the rats, or men with bachelor habits, or Lyddy Pendleton.

"Don't you —" he hesitated, and then found himself obliged to continue — "don't you want me to call Lyddy?"

"Oh, no," said Winterbourne, with an innocent self-possession. "Lyddy says she can't be broke of her rest. I think she's right. I don't believe she can. Anyway, I don't dare to try."

Lovell stared at him a moment, and again looked at the fire. It occurred to him that he might mend that, and he rose, laid on a stick, and then went poking about until he found, by the dining-room fireplace, a charred turkey-wing. With that he swept up the hearth, and keeping it still in hand, stood for a further minute looking about the room. Winterbourne was in a deep amaze. He awoke from it presently, and glanced up to find Lovell at his task.

"Oh!" he cried. "Ah! What is it? You sweeping, Jim? You're a dear fellow. But I don't believe we need to do that, do you?"

Lovell relegated the turkey-wing to the floor, and then, because it looked untidily out of place, picked it up again and hid it behind a row of books. Upon that, the disorder of the room seemed to groan at him afresh, and he took out his handkerchief and began walking about, running it over surfaces in a stealthy way, as of one who recognized the inevitableness of the task and yet knew his own idea of it to be shamefully superficial. Winterbourne watched him for a moment out of eyes flooded with kindness. Then he opened his mouth and emitted a torrent of mirth. Lovell took no notice. He appeared to be slightly interested now in his

dusting from a personal standpoint, and even rubbed a surface or two with hopeful vigor.

"You need n't do that," said his host. "I'd help you if it would do any good. I'd throw in my handkerchief and my sark. You want to know why I don't? Because it's hopeless, man, it's hopeless. You could n't make this place fit to meet Catherine Winterbourne's eye in less than a year's time and two gallons of paint and some rags at the window and an oriental rug on the floor. If you were in hell you would n't go round sprinkling with a watering-pot, would you?"

Lovell, arrested by the vigor of the simile, had paused, and doubtful of the wisdom of his mission, seemed about to relinquish it.

"Well," said Winterbourne, taking his halt for a virtual retreat, "Catherine will regard this place as hell. You could n't change its main features unless you adopted the methods I have described. Put your handkerchief in your pocket and come along and read Theocritus."

He seemed to have slipped into a mood of lightest gayety, and Lovell, looking at him an instant, decided that it was real, and that if the master of the house could take its disadvantages so easily, he need not give him a lead. He stared doubtfully at his handkerchief, shook it over the fire, and then, because he hated smeared things, with a sudden impulse tossed it into the blaze. It caught, and Winterbourne shook his head at him reproachfully.

"You are a prodigal," he said. "You will see the time when you are glad to wipe your nose on a husk. I'll have another pipe. I can't read. I am excited. It's your dusting the room. I never thought such convulsions were possible. They're not in nature, man. The stars forbid them."

While he filled his pipe, Lovell stood on the other side of the hearth, leaning on the mantel and preparing so

patently to speak that shades, like little tentative beginnings, kept chasing over his face.

"John," he said at last, "if I'm going to meet your wife —"

"You need n't, boy," said Winterbourne, lighting his pipe and speaking between the puffs. "You don't like women-folks. You shan't be brought here at the cart's tail. I'll come round to your house and we'll go on with our book."

Lovell seemed to take no notice of this concession. He looked very earnestly desirous of setting forth something in his mind, and at the same time too shy to do it.

"If you speak about me —" he began.

"Shan't, man, shan't. Would n't do such a thing. S'pose I'd betray you to pink and white girls and mothers of girls?"

"I was going to say, if I play off that idiotic old joke on them, are you going to think it's — any kind of disrespect?"

"Bless you, no," said Winterbourne heartily. "Why should I?"

"I don't know. Only if you do, I won't enter upon it, that's all. I won't do as I did with you when you brought me the trumpet, and say, 'I'm no more deaf than you are'; but I can keep away from 'em more or less."

"Lovell," said his friend earnestly, "it was a fortunate moment for you when you decided not to hear. If I had my life to live over again I'd do the same, except with one or two cronies I could trust, same as you with Dwight and me. Every civilized woman that trailed me with that look in her eyes that means tea and little sweet cakes, I'd put my hand up to my ear as you do; but I wouldn't be so smooth as you. 'Beg pardon,' I've heard you say, 'I'm

very deaf.' No, I'd put my hand up to my ear and make a face at 'em, and when they screamed I'd say, 'I'm deaf and I'm a gargoyle. I've got down off the gutter for a bat'; and then they'd think I was deaf and dotty both. So much the better. Meddlers!"

Lovell was not listening to him. He sat mutely considering.

"You see," he said, at length, "it does save me an awful lot. Folks meet me, and they don't speak to me. Sometimes I have a crack with the fellows, and I don't know what they think. Once Mrs. Ramsay stopped in the street when I was having a *klatsch* with the little new parson. What do you suppose she said? 'Your hearing is improving, isn't it, Mr. Lovell?' Scared me blue. But before I left the parson, I managed to say I could hear men's voices better than women's. But not well enough to go to church!"

Wheels had stopped at the door. Both men knew it. Winterbourne got up and tapped his pipe on the chimney-piece. Confidence had gone out of him.

"She took an earlier train," he said, and Lovell as automatically agreed with him.

A hand was on the door, and the latch lifted. The master of the house turned that way, but, the one motion made, seemed unable to rouse himself from his stupor of arrested life. Then, the door open a crack, a woman's clearly imperious voice without gave an order, evidently relating to trunks, and Lovell, in that instant of pause, realized that there was no way for him to fly unless he met the newcomer face to face. He turned with a dash, threw up the front window, sprang lightly out, and pulled down the sash after him.

The act, in its haste and vigor, seemed to rouse Winter-

bourne from his maze, and he strode forward to the door, though not in time to show the readiest alacrity. His wife was inside, pausing an appreciable moment in the hall, before he could reach her, and his eyes took in her complete and ornamental appearance. He had thought he knew exactly how she looked, line by line and tint for tint, but she was so astonishingly urban in these ancient surroundings, so equipped to make things move and insist upon her own supremacy over them, that he caught his breath in wonder and perhaps abashment. Here was a woman on the road to middle life who had kept something pathetically fruitless from the charm of youth, the special and indubitable appeal that means emotion. Her hair was dusky, fine and thick, and her eyes, of a dark blue, had plentiful lashes, — strange lids, too, that were a beauty in themselves, with a droop at the outer corner, a mystical curve that meant — what? perhaps nothing but sheer loveliness. She had a way of glancing up under those lids in an unconsidered interrogation, and this gave her sad charm an added force.

That face, the tragic pathos born in it and intensifying with every year, Winterbourne remembered through the veil of wilful oblivion he had hung before it. He had studied it passionately in the old days when there was some hope in his ardent heart of making it the index of a true content. Later he had acquiesced in its sorrowing appeal, and counselled himself that happiness is no more than the wanton guide of youth. After the lovely face had ceased to mark his own calendar of good or ill fortune, and he had bent himself obstinately to homely living and what he considered the gods meant for man when they created a fruitful earth, he had sometimes seen it before his shut eyes at the end of sleep, in the early morning before he had got hold of his self-commanding powers again, and he had groaned and bade

it begone, assuring himself that it was only a part of the tears of mortal things.

So he knew it; but he was not prepared for the figure of fashion his wife made in the instant she stood before him. She had always been exquisitely careful in her dress, according to a nice perception. Then she had been thinking of other things, inner ones, — things of the soul, she would have said. Now, in richness of material and harmony of tint, she conformed to some standard he dimly recognized as setting her apart from him in his flannel shirt and the comfortable wrinkles of his coat. This efflorescence in her he was too simple to classify as clothes. He only thought she had changed, in a way that embarrassed him. She had not lagged on the road to beauty, and he had been tramping through the mud of a ploughed field.

But she had taken the step between them and put up her face to be kissed. Winterbourne performed the marital ceremony sparsely and with some abashment. Now she was at the door again saying in her rather nervous voice, —

“Bring in the trunks, please. You’ll carry them upstairs, I hope?”

Some one shouldered a trunk and appeared with it in the doorway. Winterbourne, when he saw it was Dwight Hunter, made a small grimace which was not all a smile. The young man had been delaying outside there to give husband and wife an interval for meeting. Winterbourne stepped forward and laid hold of an end of the trunk.

“This is a neighbor of yours, Catherine,” he said. “This is Mr. Hunter.”

Hunter set down his end of the burden and took off his cap, which, after the salute, he tossed in a corner and prepared, again, to take up the trunk. Mrs. Winterbourne had smiled at him rather absently.

"I did n't know," she said, in what seemed a sufficient apology, when it came to the accompaniment of her rather intense method of speech. "The cabman had n't any team large enough, and Mr. Hunter offered his. Where shall I have my trunks put?"

Winterbourne's first instinct was to answer truthfully, "I don't know." He was himself sleeping in the chamber over the sitting-room, because it was likely to be warmer, but he had a sudden light of memory upon the picture it usually made when he went up at twelve or one after his glorious bouts with Lovell and Theocritus. There were days when Lyddy forgot to make the bed, and he found coverlet and sheets trailed on the floor in a disorderly abandon. This, he felt immediately convinced, would be one of the days. Also, he had built a fire there last night, and he remembered how the wind in the morning had sifted the ashes over the floor. All this was swiftly presented to him in a panoramic spasm of fancy, and yet he seemed to answer promptly enough, —

"The west chamber, Dwight."

Then they went up, his wife following, and as he passed his own room he had the prudence to put out his hand and shut the door. They entered the darkness of the west room, and Dwight, setting down the trunk, said in a hushed tone, as if he considered the exigency rather serious, —

"I'll run down and get the lamp."

While he was gone, Winterbourne and his wife stood in silence together. He could hear her breathe, and he thought she was even sniffing in the dampness of the place, testingly. At that he felt a comical despair, and when Hunter came plunging up bearing a light, he looked about him with almost the same measure of curiosity his wife must be feeling. He had not entered this room, nor others not needed in his active daily life, since his return, and he was prepared to find

that neglect and Lyddy together had wrought almost any witch-work upon it. When he saw what was actually there, his mind cleared, and he turned to his wife with a little swagger of frank relief as if, after all, he had something to offer a home-coming traveller. What he saw was the majesty of a room built in simple proportions, with its old beauties of wainscoting and panelling untouched. There was a rich four-poster, covered by a sheet which seemed to him sufficiently white for the purpose it served. There could be a fire in five minutes, and no doubt the drawers of the high-boy contained plenty of bedding. He gazed at his wife in an innocent community of satisfaction ; but his heart sank at sight of her. She was regarding now this, now that of the ancient furnishings with an incredulous disaffection.

"I should get my death in here," she remarked, with no scorn but simply as a statement of a fact apparent to the dullest eye. She had the air of the person who can arrange and dominate, and his spirit quailed before her.

"It can be aired," he essayed weakly, and made a stride for the window.

She was in his path, and, by one quick gesture, stopped him.

"It would have to be aired a week — and sunned — and cleaned. Where's Lyddy?"

Meantime Hunter stood beside them with a shamefaced air of sharing Winterbourne's discomfiture.

"I'll go down and fetch up the other trunks," he offered then in a conciliatory fashion, as if something in process of moving might appease the lady.

She gave him a little nod, meaning concurrence.

"Yes," she said. "They've got to be somewhere. You have n't told me." She turned to Winterbourne. "Where's Lyddy?"

"Lyddy's abed." He was answering like a sulky child.

"Abed! Where is her room? I'll ring for her."

Winterbourne, with the defence of the weak in his hands, grew at once bolder.

"I can't have Lyddy disturbed at this time of night," he announced. Then he looked at her appealingly, as if to beg her, out of her womanly resources, to find some other path to harmony.

"Is n't she doing your work? You wrote me she was."

"Yes, but she's an old woman, Kitty." He ventured on the diminutive timidly, perhaps as a slightest possible atom thrown into the balance, a coaxing weight. "You can't rout Lyddy out." Then he raised his voice. "Here, Hunter. Give over there. Don't tackle 'em alone."

He hastened down, grateful for a break in the current between him and his wife, and together he and Hunter rattled the trunks up and stood them in a row. Mrs. Winterbourne, purse in hand, was turning to Dwight with a businesslike inquiry on what had suddenly become her careworn face. But Winterbourne, a hand on his shoulder, turned him summarily about, and seemed to propel him toward the stairs.

"Much obliged, my boy," he said. "I'll be there in the morning. Four o'clock, remember."

Hunter, on the way down, reasoned rather perplexedly to himself that a man whose wife had come home to a disordered house and no adequate explanations of anything could hardly be at liberty to go clamming at four o'clock in the morning, especially as the time was wearing on and four o'clock would be there before Winterbourne was likely to know it. He stopped at the stair-foot, and having considered a minute more, called back, —

"I can't go to-morrow. See you again about it."

Then Winterbourne with his wife and the baggage in the

unwelcome chamber heard the closing of the door and the sound of wheels down the street. Another of his dear companions gone. He turned with an involuntary sigh to his wife and spoke, all meekness.

“It’s warmer downstairs,” said he.

III

WHEN they went downstairs and entered the sitting-room, Winterbourne felt a momentary accession of courage because the familiar spot, with its two chairs before the smouldering fire, and the fire itself, gave him a habitable feeling. He drew forward Lovell's chair, with a show of hospitality, and his wife, after looking at it frowningly, as if, after her experience of the chamber, she distrusted all surfaces, sat down and resigned herself to alien circumstances. She recalled suddenly, though late, a resolve she had made on her way here: a determination that the old arguments, the old strife between her own idealism and what she considered her husband's eccentric obstinacy, should never be renewed. She had come home fully bent upon putting the homely and commonplace axioms of marital life into force. Should he upbraid, she was prepared to meet him with a smile. But he never did upbraid, she knew. He had childish temper-fits at unexpected times, when he shook his fist at the sky and bade it bear witness that no man was ever so much the butt of godhead as he. Those, she felt almost sure, would hardly trouble her now. She was even prepared to face his most incomprehensible quality of devotion to hideously plain living, his refusal to discuss ideals of any sort, and his tacit denial that love between men and women demanded any poetic expression after its first fervor had flown. So it was as a very good wife that she sat gingerly in the doubtful chair and said to him with careful deference, —

“ I don't think I gathered exactly why Lyddy was n't to be called. Is she ill? ”

Winterbourne answered shortly, because he was not at all sure she might not defeat him on a domestic point, as being within her rights, and hale Lyddy out of her retreat.

"She's got the worst of all sicknesses," he said briefly. "She's old."

"Can she cook?"

"She cooks, and likes it. Cooks well, too. What she does n't like is being expected to hop round us three times and make us more comfortable than humans ought to be. Lyddy's got beyond playing that kind of a game."

His wife looked at the fire with a clarity of housewifely justice.

"I suppose you pay her?" she remarked.

"Pay her? Why, yes, of course I pay her. She's laid up a little, but she depends on that for shrouds and things."

"The girls are coming to-morrow."

"Celia —" he hesitated.

"And Lilian."

"Celia better?"

He was still fumblingly anxious to show a proper interest, and yet thinking how dear, how very dear, the black book was at his side, the book he must not open, must hardly think of lest he fly to it.

"Celia has n't been ill."

"You wrote me —" He looked into the fire as if he could perhaps summon up the telltale letter. "You said there was something the matter with her."

"Oh, that!" Her face took on the look of worry he knew so well, out of the useless proficiency gained in his acquaintance with her emotional distresses of one sort or another. "It's quite a long story. I did n't mean she was sick. I meant she told lies."

"Told lies? What about?"

"Everything. It's come on her quite lately."

"What does she do? Embroider what happens, or tell what has n't happened?"

"Both. It's very serious, John. I don't know what to do with her."

He spoke flippantly out of his amusement over what he felt was another of Catherine's mental tragedies.

"Why don't you send her to a specialist? Send her to an alienist?"

"I should like to. I've thought of it."

"Good God! don't put her under that kind of a lens. The child is n't mad."

"No, but there's some lesion, there's something abortive in her brain —"

He stared at her.

"I wish we did n't have to borrow terms for things," he said. "There's no more damning sign of the times than laymen using words and thinking they've got somewhere by it. Say the girl's a liar, if she is a liar. Don't fish out her brain and fumble with it."

"But she's my responsibility."

He looked into the fire gloweringly and said nothing. He had heard a great deal about Catherine's responsibilities. They had almost made him resolve, in a reactionary spite, that he would have none.

"How is the other girl?" he asked.

"Lilian? So far — John, she's an enormous disappointment."

"Well, you don't care, do you? Your affections aren't involved?"

"My affections, no. But Celia's are."

"Is she fond of her?"

"Naturally. Her sister!"

She looked at him as if the implication that sisters were not fond might be monstrous. Winterbourne thought he had heard of such cases, but he said nothing because he remembered that, with Catherine, the clever thing was to avoid argument. She had plenty of time for it, but it kept him from the fellowship of books. That striking him less like an invitation than a picture rescued from old days and thrown upon a screen before him for an instant, made him steal a glance at the book waiting there for him, patient, inscrutable, holding its beauties until the foolish mind got ready to abandon these peddling discussions and come back to calms and sanities. His hand crept out toward his pipe, too; but he withdrew it. That was one thing he could not remember about Catherine. She might not mind smoking, but it seemed reasonable that she did.

Catherine was settling to a leisurely flow of talk, of the sort she chose, not the lazy interchange of trifles born out of the common air, sparks struck out as the breath comes, but stories interminably prolonged. Winterbourne hated them. He liked to embark himself on a monologue, speculation about the things in heaven and earth; but an infinite number of parentheses opening his mind to the minds of tedious people, he abhorred. She continued,—

“You know how we found Lilian?”

“I believe you wrote me.”

It was in one of the long letters constructed according to an ill-chosen method of page-numbering, he readily assumed. He knew how the letters looked, and how he faithfully studied through them from the first page to the finish, and then back to the second, which had to be tipped at right angles, when the whole could as easily have been written like a book.

“It was on our way to New York, you know, the month

after we came home from abroad. The train was stalled. We got out and went to spend the night at an inn in that little town. What was the name of that town? I never can remember."

Winterbourne shifted his feet, the one over the other.

"Never mind the town," he suggested. "It's probably not material."

"No. Well, I shall think of it. And there was this girl. She had a ring, — it's exactly like a story, — a little onyx ring, hung round her neck by a ribbon, because it was too little for her to wear. And that was so queer that it attracted Celia's notice. She began to talk to her. And Lilian told her name quite simply, — Elizabeth Hartwell."

"I thought her name was Lilian."

"Oh, no. We call her Lilian because it's so much better for a singing name — Lilian Winterbourne. But her real name is Elizabeth Hartwell."

"What condemned foolishness!" said Winterbourne, escaped into his normal habit of outcry. "As if you could n't sing under one name as well as another. A crow does n't caw because he's a crow. If you called a thrush a catbird, it would n't alter his throat."

"Oh, but it's most important! All those things are. We've gone into it very deeply and we know. And what do you think she was actually doing when we found her?"

She paused for the effect of her dramatic climax.

"Tying some kind of a trinket round her neck by a string, was n't she?"

"No, no. The ring was round her neck. That's how Celia recognized her. You see she had the mate to it. Some nice old gentleman — that is, I think he was old. It may be he was just middle-aged and seemed old to them —"

"Catherine," broke in Winterbourne, so exactly in the

tone of past fulminations that she jumped perceptibly in her chair, "Catherine, I don't care how old he was."

"No, but these are facts, and I like to get them accurate. Well, when they were children, he took a fancy to them because they were pretty and cunning, and he gave them these two little rings. Do you see?"

Winterbourne gripped his hands on the arms of his chair and waited. It was evident to him that he had broken his intent to be the courteous and patient host, and he meant to renew the guard on himself.

"And now what," she was continuing, "what do you think she was actually doing when we found her?"

He shook his head at the fire, gloomily.

"She was washing a floor!"

The tone of high triumph with which she delivered this at once convinced him that it was expected to have an enormous effect.

"Good for her!" he responded, cordially, though in the dark.

"Yes, she was washing a floor, precisely like Agnes Surriage."

Winterbourne remembered far more about the Greece of the Golden Age than about Great Britain's colonies; but his wife, innocent that she had failed of her effect, went on, —

"Well, the girls were simply enchanted to find each other. Lilian does n't say much, but I think she was enchanted, too. And then we heard her singing about her work, and we found she had this astounding voice — oh, rich and perfectly splendid."

"That's good," said Winterbourne patiently.

"Yes, was n't it? And then the question was, what to do about it?"

That was it, Winterbourne reasoned, in recognized de-

spair. Catherine would have to do something about it. She could n't find a priceless voice and refrain from peering at it and fingering it, and perhaps in the end somehow tarnishing it.

"Here was this glorious voice," she continued, with high relish of her tale, "and nothing was being done."

"Was n't she singing?"

"Yes, in the parlor, in the evening, to a melodeon. They called it an instrument. She called it so, too. Fancy!"

"They are honest people," said Winterbourne, who had no ear, save for the poetic description of a flute at dawn. "They're all instruments of torture."

But she was ignoring him. These mild lunacies of his seemed to her, as they always had, the outbreak of the masculine, which was also the childlike mind. She had the theory, evolved from the surprises and griefs of her marital experience, that men are but children. If you take them otherwise, you are likely to die broken-hearted, of the disappointments they deal you. But a comprehensive scheme of their undeveloped soul is your only safeguard. This, she concluded, was one of the exigencies when she was not to mind, and she continued,—

"We took her away at once. Celia would n't hear to anything else. I believe if I had refused her, she would have stayed herself."

"Took her away from a good place where she was contented and earning her living and singing to the boarders in the evening?"

"John, it was a common boarding-house—a kind of tavern."

"Was n't she contented there?"

"Yes. That was the trouble. She was perfectly contented."

"Why have you gone and upset her life?" Winterbourne

pelted at her with exasperation. "What have you done it for?"

Catherine saw he did n't understand, but she could afford to explain herself.

"We carried her off to New York. The first thing was to get her some clothes. She can't wear Celia's very well. Celia is very slender. Then we took her to several music-teachers — I won't trouble you with the names. You would n't know."

"No. Don't trouble me with anybody's name."

"They all agreed she sang wonderfully. She has a perfect method. And we got a hearing for her."

She looked at him brightly, challenging his response to the luck of it, but he was rearranging the fire, and saying without interest, —

"That's good."

"I simply went to all the people I knew and threw myself on their mercies. I said, 'Here's a girl that will sweep the town some day. She's Sembrich, she's Lehmann.' I said anything that came into my head. I said, 'When she's arrived, we shall be glad we were in at the start.' I got some perfectly splendid patronesses."

The word displeased him. It smacked of the worship of the rich.

"Oh, I forgot to say I had her taught a half-dozen songs — ballads, you know, something simple. And everybody understood she was doing it quite without training. Well. And what do you think? The thing was a failure, a downright, miserable failure."

"I suppose she missed the instrument," said Winterbourne, slyly glad she did fail. He thought there was something unholy in the triumph of managing and conjuring by empty names.

"I suppose she did!" A warm indignation put life into her lovely eyes. "She stood cowering there in that dress I'd paid I don't know how much for, and her hands shook, and she sang like a little school-girl before her teacher. Oh, I could have slapped her!"

"She's a good girl," said Winterbourne. "She's the girl for my money. I'm glad she could n't stand up like a cock-atoe and squawk."

"Celia was in the back row. She got perfectly white. I thought she was going to faint. And Lilian saw her towards the end, and what do you think she did? She broke down and began to cry."

"You got your Nemesis that time, did n't you, Catherine?" said Winterbourne, with indulgent sympathy. "Did n't that teach you anything?"

"It taught me she'd got to be made to meet an audience. She's got to be taught to manage her voice—"

"I thought she managed it by nature."

"So she does when nobody's looking at her. Or when there's only a music-teacher in the room. She thinks he's just a quiet, pleasant man that knows how to do something — Oh, well, I don't pretend to say what she thinks. But stand her up before a well-dressed audience, and she's as *gauche* as a heron on one leg."

"Well, you've tried her and she does n't work. Why don't you let her alone?"

"I can't let her alone. I can't for Celia's sake. Celia'd be broken-hearted. And I can't for her own sake. There she's got this perfectly magnificent voice, and it simply must be cultivated."

"Let her alone, Catherine. You let her alone. She's all right as she is. She'll marry a car-conductor, and sing to her babies, and she'll be a happy woman if you'll let her."

She gave a little shriek.

"A car-conductor! Marry a car-conductor! Celia's sister!"

"Celia be hanged. Why should n't all our sisters marry car-conductors? And what's this pother about Celia's sister? Celia was contented enough without any sister till she knew she had one."

His wife was looking at him solemnly.

"John," she said, "I believe Celia has missed her all her life."

"Oh, come, Catherine, don't get up theories about Celia."

"She has done more than I can tell you, already, for Celia's development. Celia has been a rather unfeeling child —"

"She's been infernally dutiful trying to do the tricks you expected of her."

"Yes, but I never felt any real affection in Celia. It was a great sorrow to me. She needed somebody of her own blood to bring it out. You know there's the family feeling first, then the tribal feeling —"

"Catherine, don't you hand me over the recipes you get from reading clubs," said her husband, shaking his head at her until his locks flew as in a breeze of his negation. "I can't stand 'em."

"Celia is just beginning to comprehend the family feeling. The rest will come. And it has got to come through Lilian."

"Now tell me." He thrust one hand into his pocket and turned his great bulk sidewise in the chair. "If you are going to begin this devil's symphony, this rake's progress through the world for the approval of well-dressed people, why don't you stay in the world, Catherine? What are you here for in Clyde, where we don't sing and we don't pipe, and we won't dance to your piping?"

She faced him with eyes full of an earnest and pure purpose. It gave the words she presently uttered a startling incongruity.

"John, I have n't a cent of money."

"The devil!" said Winterbourne, and stared at her.

She gazed back solemnly, aware of her embarrassment and meaning to meet the question.

"Not a cent," she repeated. "I know what you'd say if you were n't too generous and great-hearted —"

Winterbourne groaned over the warmth of the adjectives, and felt how little they applied to the attempt at justice with which he had managed the division of their goods.

"You'd say," she went on, "that when I went abroad, four years ago, you made over to me nearly everything you had."

"No, no, Catherine. I only gave you three-quarters. It was n't because I was generous. It was because I knew how to do sums. I sat down and figured it out that if you were going to live a life of gilded vanities in Europe and the cities of America, you'd need three times as much as I, because I was returning to the soil. That's all. But where did it go? I thought it was a kind of a little fortune."

"It was. I lost it."

"Lost it? Where? Carry it in your stocking and have it tumble out, or keep it in your bedroom slipper and get it dusted out of the window?"

She had not the slightest aversion to telling him, because it evidently seemed to her that although she was unfortunate she was not really culpable.

"I lost it," she said simply, "in the panic. Mrs. Greenough was putting a great deal into Western Silt, and I went in as heavily as I could."

The madness of Ajax was nothing to this. That Winterbourne could understand, because God sent it. But this

modern tawdry gambling according to the dicta of other gamblers, for more money and more and more, when one had a pocketful of clean coin to live honestly on — he could not even think of it.

“Catherine!” he said. “Catherine!”

The full note of his voice recalled her to what he must be thinking. His temper-fits were never over what was large and really tragic. They came when a pin pricked him or he could not find his pipe. But if the moment were really urgent, then he was as grave as all the judges. She began to feel even terrified. Her heart beat faster, and without seeing just why, she realized that she was in a difficult place.

“You don’t think I ought to have done it,” she said, in a small voice. “You don’t approve.”

“It was your own money, Catherine.”

“A great many people do it. Almost every one.”

“Catherine, it was your own money.”

She began to be hungry and a little chilled. He was her husband, but he seemed like a stranger, and suddenly she felt that her Celia, for whom she had lived so many years, did not really love her very much, and that Lilian, whom she was beginning to help, did not love her at all. And she had no one of her own blood to turn to, and there was n’t a bed in the house fit to sleep in. The tears came silently, and Winterbourne saw them on her cheeks. He stirred uneasily in his chair.

“Oh, for God’s sake, Catherine,” he besought her, “don’t do that!”

She seemed to have brought back in a rush the other times he had seen her cry, and swept, with a besom of emotion, all the great calm things that had occupied him for the four years, out of the house so that they went

scudding into the night, ill-used, blameless creatures, their locks flying in the wind. She looked about her, in desolate acquiescence, until her eyes took in the possibilities of the old leather sofa.

"I could curl up there," she said miserably. "I could put my ulster over me."

Winterbourne got up and walked distractedly back and forth, moved partly by the poor setting of the scene where they were renewing their friendliness, but pursued, too, though that he would not recognize, by a prophetic sense that to-morrow would see the house swept and dusted, set in the cold order that brought duties and social intimacies in its train. She was confirming him.

"To-morrow we'll see what can be done," she said, as she rose languidly, sure at last that she was tired. "The girls could have the two back chambers. I suppose there's bed linen enough."

Winterbourne struck his clenched fist against a door, in passing, and she started at the sound. What had he to do with the knowledge of bed linen? his unquiet soul was asking. Lyddy had reigned over his discomfort and reigned well. His sheets might have been of flax washed by Nausicaä and her maidens, or they might have been calico from New England looms. But sleep on them was sweet because he had gone to them from the occupations he loved. Catherine, curled up on the sofa, pulling her ulster to her chin, was looking up at him with a tired face, but smiling ruefully. He saw how fervently she wished she had n't come, yet she was not going to be hateful enough to say it. That was a way of behaving he could approve, and he had an impulse of gratitude to her, so warm that he tucked the ulster round her feet, murmuring something rhythmically and grotesquely soothing in his beard.

"It is n't any worse than a sleeping car," she said, reassuring herself, and then added what frightened him for good and sent him shuddering up to his room: "We must get some sleep. The girls will be coming in the morning."

IV

THE next morning Winterbourne woke early because the time-piece of his mind, set to the hour for clamming, had not readjusted itself. There he lay on his disordered bed, in the first cold light, and shuddered inwardly to think how completely his castle of indolence had been surprised, and how weak its capitulation had shown it to be. He sadly knew that no woman inheriting what were called decent traditions could live in a house like his without turning to with soap and water and hateful dust-raisings, and conjuring it into the form other houses wore. The change seemed to him more than he could bear without incurring danger of that outbreak Lyddy characterized as "flying off the handle," when his pulses hammered out an alarum against things as they are. It had all been beautifully settled, he thought, four years ago, when, by the sacrifice of mere money, he had relegated his wife to the activities of her chosen existence and had crept back here to luxuriate in simplicities. But the bond that had drawn them together had capriciously tightened once more, and here they were back again, pulling all awry in the double harness he, at least, deplored.

He stepped out of bed like an old man, and only after his cold bath felt like facing the widespread difficulty. Even the bath itself was on a diminished scale. Up to this time he had run half a mile to the fresh river and taken a plunge even when he had to break the ice to do it, but to-day his waning spirits kept him to a meagre bowl.

When he went downstairs, rather softly as if he were afraid of calling the attention of orderly household gods to

his sad condition, he heard voices from the dining-room and groaned to himself, knowing exactly what sort of interview was going on.

"But if you mean to work at all," his wife was saying, in her clear and now didactic voice, "you must work properly."

"I ain't goin' to work," Lyddy was returning, with her peculiar indifference of tone. "My work's all behind me. I'm past my prime, an' I ain't goin' to kill myself for anybody."

The battle was on, he knew, and it required the full force of his halting will to keep him from turning the other way and crossing the hall, breakfastless, to the room where the refuge of his books awaited him. But he took the last unwilling steps into the dining-room, and there his wife, clad in a charming *négligé*, stood resting one hand on the table in a judicial attitude, looking at Lyddy on her knees before the sulking fire, blowing it without the aid of bellows, and turning eyes wrinkled about from the smoke, to toss back her negative phrases in a detached and altogether improper manner to the mistress of the house.

Winterbourne looked at his wife for an instant's earnest scrutiny before he entered the lists on the side of what he considered the weaker combatant. Catherine was pale, but charming. Her face had a wan patience that would have gone to his heart if it were not so irritating. She seemed to have made up her mind not to complain, and though it nettled him in the necessity it bespoke for control, he knew how much it cost her. Then he turned to Lyddy, who, in her loose calico confined by an apron string at the waist, her small twist of hair and the angularities of her squatting figure, protruding elbows, even ears at too obtuse an angle, was, he realized, a sight. He had been thinking of Lyddy with nothing but gratitude, her years of service, her auto-

matic way of creating good plain food, and then letting a man alone to live out his life in a sane and natural fashion; but now, with her face lined by a thousand wrinkles, and the general dustiness of her aspect, as if the grains from the flying wheel of toil had ground into her and become a part of her integument, he saw how unfitted she was to satisfy any domestic ideal. But that only made him hate ideals the more.

"Let the fire alone, Lyddy," he said compassionately, because she seemed, with him, to be an outcast from some mysterious precinct neither of them wished to enter. "It'll do well enough."

He approached it and gave the forestick a warning kick, with the result of upward-flying sparks and a following blaze. Lyddy scrambled deftly up and stood before him, squat and unlovely, yet, for his needs, serviceable to the last degree.

"Your breakfast's ready," she said to him, with an entire and yet what seemed an innocent disregard of the mistress of the house. "I've set it out on the table."

With that she disappeared into the kitchen at her accustomed trot, and Winterbourne was left alone before his wife. At once his sympathies were with her, because resistance had, he saw, gone too far. She was looking at him with pathetic, tear-filled eyes.

"I told her to prepare the table here," she said gently. "I could see the dining-room was n't in use. I asked where the table linen was."

"I've spoiled her," Winterbourne explained in haste. "You see I eat in the kitchen and go off about my business. She does n't see why everybody should n't. Lyddy's an old woman. It's a long time since she did any civilized work."

"I know it, John; but if you are going to make her

your housekeeper, she must keep your house. If you are going to pay her money, she must earn it."

"Well! well!"

Those were, he knew, quite accurate conclusions, yet they belonged to the detestable civilized code he was trying to abjure. He strode off to the kitchen, and presently, while Catherine still waited, he was back again with a fine white napkin in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other. He spread the napkin on an end of the great mahogany table and set down the cup upon it with the extreme care adopted by hands when they distrust themselves in an unaccustomed task. Then he went off to the kitchen again and returned with a plate of corn-cake and a saucer of butter. Catherine, watching him, felt absurdly small and pathetic with this service going on. She was hungry, and yet it did not come to her that Winterbourne was bound by vows to share his food with her. It seemed a grace in him. He drew off and regarded his preparations frowningly.

"There!" said he. He seemed satisfied. His brow cleared, and his smile, warm and ready as the best sunshine, came and illuminated him. "There's your breakfast, honey. Now draw up."

A flush ran into her face and stayed there, lured by the caressing word. She did not know he had drawn such lubricants from old stores to use them now on the children he went to play with, at the end of the town, and that it slipped out unbidden because she seemed so like a child herself. To her it meant renewal of their bond. He drew back the chair invitingly, and she slipped into it and tasted her coffee. It was good. Lyddy might have forgotten all the arts that make life gentle, but she had retained the faithful formulæ that please the palate. Catherine broke a piece of bread and looked up at him with a recognition of its symbolism. But

he was regarding her in a frank satisfaction, intent only on seeing her fed.

"Where 's yours?" she asked.

He smiled at her because, by eating, she was pleasing him.

"On the kitchen table," he answered, and before she could remonstrate, he had gone to seek it.

So they breakfasted apart, — Winterbourne, glancing up from time to time as he devoured great pieces of the bread, to interrogate Lyddy's back bending over the kneading-board on another table, and wonder how her stubbornness could be cast out.

The Winterbourne kitchen was large and square and low, with a great blackened beam overhead, heavy doors, and an enormous hearth invaded by a modern range. But beside it was the door of the brick oven, Lyddy's adjunct to Saturday's baking, and the mantel was high and narrow over it, melting into the wall by a miracle of panelling. Winterbourne loved the room because it had a homely look of comfort, and always a cosy kindliness more enwrapping than the warmth of fireplaces. Lyddy loved it, for it was her domain, and even now in her stubborn mind she was considering whether it would not be craftier to serve meals to the alien woman without there in the dining-room than to dare her into the kitchen, an invasion more to be deplored than the taking of many extra steps.

Winterbourne had finished and risen from his chair. He stood by the table looking at her, and Lyddy knew it, though her back was turned.

"Lyddy," he said at length, quite peaceably.

Her heart knocked against her old side. She adored him, and when he unconsciously coaxed her he was irresistible.

"Lyddy, you know that's my wife in there."

Lyddy heaved up one scornful shoulder.

"The two young ladies are coming this morning."

"Young ladies?"

She had to answer, out of the surprise of it. He nodded at her obstinate back. If he was sorry for her, he was tempted to explain, he was a thousand times more anguished for himself. But he continued irreproachably, with a decorum his wife could not have exceeded, —

"Our daughter, Miss Celia, and her sister." In his desire to fulfil the law he would have claimed both sisters, but at the instant he failed to remember the other one's name.

"Who under the sun's that?" Lyddy broke forth harshly. "That's Dwight Hunter. Who's he got with him?"

Dwight Hunter in his great wagon was driving up to the door. He had on a suit of clothes conformable to usage, and for that reason Winterbourne wondered why he looked so strange. On the broad seat with him were two girls set off by such bravery of veils and floating pennons that Winterbourne felt his heart drop at the sight of them. His coward mind prompted him to sink back into his seat at the table, put his head in his hands and burst into lamentations like the bellowings of Ajax. These two hussies, he said to himself, were bringing the city, with its meretricious splendors, into his plain paradise. What his wife had begun last night with her air of civilized equipment, they would treble. But with that hoppling marriage-bond about his feet, he knew he could not escape them, and that shame and an added suffering lay in waiting until, with honeyed blandishments, they came and dragged him from his lair. So he made a plunge at the dining-room door, opened it, and was at once in the midst of three women greeting one another affectionately.

Hunter, too, was there. He had brought in a couple of suit-cases, and with his cap in hand, all young approbation of the lasses, was waiting to know where the luggage

could be carried. Winterbourne, in his mood of general disfavor, felt a sudden hatred of him for being pleased. Hunter, he knew, had gone unnecessarily to meet the train, to be sure the incoming horde should find no difficulty in making their onslaught, and Hunter was being paid for it in having come on two charming girls who, not knowing his standing, were treating him indifferently indeed, but pleasantly. And as Winterbourne stood there, loathing everybody impartially, Catherine saw him and gave a cry.

"Celia," she called, in a tone of happy warning, "don't you see? There's your father."

Celia, the slighter of the two girls, turned and came to him with a silken rush, and the waft of a subtle breath not quite a perfume. She put up her hands to his shoulders while his arms unwillingly enveloped her. Then she gave him two little kisses on his bearded cheeks, so light and yet so quick that it seemed as if she ecstatically blew them to him. Almost instantly she turned away, still keeping a hand on him.

"Lilian," she called, in her rather high, pleasantly vibrating voice. "Lilian, here's father."

Then Lilian advanced, though at a walking pace of two or three steps, and Winterbourne expected another waft of romantic fervor and more butterfly kisses. But the girl put out her hand to him and waited until he took it, and he immediately felt impelled to lose no time in doing it. His great fingers and palm closed upon a good-sized hand of a compact feel, which returned his grasp with only a suitable degree of warmth. Then he looked at her. There she was, his unknown daughter, built with a more generous promise than the other one, yet round and slender and tall enough for suggestions of the statuesque, the calm. She had brown eyes and brown hair, and a mouth touched with some wilful melancholy of

youth. But although she looked so unassuming, a little saddened by some background of experience he could not touch, she puzzled him. Holding her hand that instant, he felt as if they were old friends, more bound to each other than to the two women there who knew them both before.

Perhaps some word of welcome ought to have been expected of him, but he failed to give it, and dropping her hand, turned to Celia, who was talking in little breathless sentences that seemed to want to express great pleasure at seeing him. Celia, he thought, in spite of his wife's mysterious hints of psychological complications, was easily enough understood. She had, he noticed for the first time, a curious resemblance to his wife, perhaps because she was of the same eager type and they had worn upon each other in their trained gymnastics toward the ideal until they moved and carried themselves in the same way. Celia had a lovely slenderness. She was pale, with black eyes and soft black hair, the nose with nostrils too large for beauty, perhaps, but hinting pride. There were curves in her lips, unlike the soft fulness of her sister's. She made the best of herself, it was plain for the practised eye to see, and yet the simplicity of her clothes so became her that she had all the naturalness of a considered art.

"You did n't quite know you had another daughter, did you, father?" she was saying, with a laugh that ran in and out of her speech like silver bells.

He meant to answer her, but instead he turned to the other girl, standing there with what seemed to be an accustomed patience.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Elizabeth," she answered, in a low voice rich in natural excellencies. "Lizzie Hartwell."

He found he was remembering his wife's picture of her

as they had come upon her washing a floor, the little ring swinging by a ribbon about her neck.

"Is that what they called you when you —"

"When I was at the tavern?" she answered, with the same simplicity. "No. They called me Bess."

"I shall call you Bess," said Winterbourne.

But his wife and Celia were, he felt, making a little agonized flutter.

"I told you, John," his wife was saying, with a soft reproachfulness; and Celia added, as if he had not been let into secrets he would be sure to approve, —

"We took the name of Lilian for her, Lilian Winterbourne. It makes such a difference, don't you know! Don't you think it's a nice name, father,—Lilian Winterbourne?"

He could see, out of his old chafed memories of his wife's management, how they had taken the girl over into their hands and wafted even her name away from her, for everybody's good. She stood looking at him with those candid eyes which did not appeal because the soul behind them evidently acquiesced in many things it would not have chosen, but which somehow seemed to be asking for vindication and the right to live. She spoke again, softly as if she breathed it and were a little afraid of hurting somebody's desires or prejudices.

"My name is Bessie Hartwell."

The two other women gave a little flurried rustle, and exchanged a look, all a fleeting despair, yet kindly, too. They seemed to see her returning to some old vice from which the moment had but just now rescued her.

"Bess, you're a good girl," said Winterbourne inexplicably. Then he added, "Have you had breakfast?"

"Oh, yes," Celia assured him, they had breakfasted at the hotel before starting, very early indeed because they had

been so anxious to be here. They had taken an earlier train than the one mother suggested. Here she picked up mother's hand with a pretty affection which seemed calculated to the onlooker because it was so well-considered, and Catherine, on her part, caught at the caressing hand quite eagerly and held it. In the old days when Winterbourne had given a daily amount of thought to the possibility of their coming out superbly, he and Catherine, in their marriage venture, he had studied her until he was acutely sensitive to meanings in her face and air. Then he had given up the puzzle and settled down into an unthinking acquiescence; but the data he had collected then were still at hand. He knew, he found, why she was doing things. And the little impetuous hand-clasp showed him that she was still eager for affection she did not get, still trying, in some fashion, to fulfil the ideal she had built up for herself. It terrified him, and he turned brusquely away from them.

"You'll make yourselves comfortable, won't you?" he said, with the bluff assumption that the materials for comfort could be found. "I'm going down to the Jellybys'."

Celia was ready with her light laugh.

"How curious! That's a name in Dickens."

Winterbourne was good-humored again. He nodded his shaggy head at her and smiled.

"Right you are," said he. "Their name is Ramsay. I call them Jellyby after their mother."

"That isn't Anna Clayton Ramsay?" asked his wife, coming into the question with a social quickness. "The philanthropist?"

"It's Anna Clayton Ramsay," Winterbourne returned, with emphasis. "She has five children and a poor devil of a husband. The poor devil of a husband goes into town on the six-thirty every morning, and comes back after

dark. I never saw him. I don't believe anybody ever saw him."

Dwight Hunter was running down the stairs. Everybody had forgotten him, and nobody was ever to know that he had found a broom above and had been sweeping the rooms where he put the luggage, and awkwardly essaying the plumping up of beds.

"Dwight," Winterbourne called, "did you ever see Ramsay, Mrs. Jellyby's husband?"

Dwight halted in the doorway, cap in hand and the signs of his distress over feminine beauty in this Castle Dreadful written all over his handsome face.

"Yes," he said, "I've seen Ramsay."

"What's he like? now what's Ramsay like, 'crawling between earth and heaven,' and letting that woman plunge herself into intellectual debauchery?"

"John!" breathed his wife.

"Oh, Ramsay's a little fellow, with a green bag."

Winterbourne raised his fists and his glance to the ceiling. The clenched hands seemed to have found something to pull themselves up by, where in person he could interrogate the highest tribunal.

"O all-ruling Jove!" he thundered. "Odin! Thor! listen to him. Ramsay is a man with a green bag. That's all we any of us know of Ramsay, a little God-forsaken creature stealing out in the morning light like a maggot from a cheese, and doing jobs to support that woman and her brood."

"He's with a broker," said Dwight impartially.

"I said so, did n't I?"

"How many children are there, father?" Celia inquired, not that she cared, but because she had the habit of social interchange.

"There are five children. Their mother is away all day speaking before mothers' clubs. She leaves an Irish girl in the kitchen, and she left a puling old-maid aunt in a bedroom until she died last year. The children are coming up like puppies in a kennel. If I didn't go down there every forenoon, and take a hand, they'd be little Esquimaux."

Bess glanced at him quickly. She had been standing in a perfect stillness, like a statue of patience, but this seemed to move her. Catherine gave him a sudden look, full of the old jealousy that came of her being a childless wife. But it was Celia who spoke, with that bright interest of her social readiness.

"You take care of them? What are their names, father?"

"The oldest is Timothy. The third is Anthony. The darling girl is Antoinette. I have never troubled to learn the rest of their names. I begin at the bottom and call them Teeny and Tiny and Tony and Tonty and Tim."

"Delicious! and those are not their names?"

But Winterbourne had talked enough about his share of it. He was guiltily getting his soft hat and stick from the hall, muttering in no articulate fashion, but to give himself countenance for deserting the domestic field, when the day was so near lost. Catherine, as his hand was on the latch, slipped out after him.

"John," said she.

He waited, and looked at her, frowning. She went on in a lowered tone, suiting the extreme of caution.

"Don't you think Mrs. Ramsay could do something?"

He stared at her, and she continued looking at him with her pathetic eyes.

"For Lilian, I mean. Get her a hearing somewhere. She could, surely. Everybody knows her."

Winterbourne thumped the floor with his stick and set a guard upon his tongue.

"I should rather," he said at length, "put the girl into a factory and let her earn day's wages."

"What, Lilian? Don't, John. She could n't work in a factory."

"Then let her starve," said Winterbourne, opening the door and stepping out. "We'll all starve before we conjure up patronesses out of Jellybys and the women's clubs where they riot and batten."

Not once had it happened, when he threw himself with a kind of abandon into these futile rages, that his wife had laughed. She never could laugh. They were solemn earnest to her. Now he saw the tears coming, in the old way, and grasped his stick and strode off, furious. Catherine stood a moment watching him, despair in her heart and on her face. Then she went droopingly in and Hunter met her at the door, saying in a wheedling voice,—

"Could I help you, Mrs. Winterbourne, about moving furniture round, or anything?"

V

IT was "down the road" where the Ramsays lived, though Clyde had streets now, properly bricked, and the road, according to the old sense, began outside the assemblage of commodious houses and ran straight to the wharves, smelling ever more and more of clams and tar. But Clyde was all country, even in the heart of it, where a few of the old houses had been hatefully transformed, the fences replaced by a stone coping, verandas and bow-windows cruelly blotching old-time simplicities. Living was very peaceful here because the individual found such elbow-room. If a man performed the oddest antics, he was not perpetually reminded of them and his after peace endangered. The listeners in twenty houses where the little bird of casual rumor flew at once, might laugh, for the general sense of humor was robust, but the laughter was indulgent, veined redly with the recognition that human nature is of an eccentric pattern, and who knows where it might break next, with so many seams across?

It was a kindly place, the old dovetailing so closely into the new that after all it did n't know how new it was, how ready for seed which should not be all poppy and balm, as it used to be in past days when the best families were about all heaven was expected to see and take note of, and the others worked for the best ones and touched caps to them almost feudally. It was quite different now, the outsider could have seen, though Clyde itself still looked at its own image in the pond and thought there was nothing else to be mirrored there, except of course the blue heaven, and

that was intended for a background. But in the outskirts, people of another sort were populous. They were clammers, and Dwight Hunter was sending the clams up to market. Certain other of the men were working for him "by the day," and he was letting them out to the more prosperous who wanted lawns kept up and gardens petted. Then there was talk of starting creameries down by the Point, and of these also Hunter was chief prophet. The town was not asleep, and though it kept its older attitude of somnolence, it would have you understand that presently it meant to be broad awake.

Winterbourne went striding along, pounding with his stick which he did not need with any middle-aged man's necessity, but adopted as another vehicle of utterance. So, when he was a boy, had he seen his grandfather stride and stamp, but, he would innocently have told you, his grandfather had a whirlwind of a temper and behaved tempestuously indoors and out. When he reached the Ramsays' house, he stood for a moment at the end of the garden-path, chuckling with anticipatory delight to see how many faces were at the window awaiting him. There were four, exactly the count he had expected, and he prolonged the moment in artful contemplation of an imaginary something he was turning over with his stick, to whet anticipation to its limit.

The house, a rambling square, three-storied, with yellow paint coming off in blisters, had more of the look of departed grandeur than Winterbourne's own. But the buds had begun to swell on the jessamine wreathing the tall rounded trellis at the door, and it could be seen that, when spring was fairly at work upon it, the tangled luxuriance of the growth would be wonderful. A window came up, and childish voices rose in a tyrannous treble.

"Come along, Jackie! Come along! Come along!"

Winterbourne raised his stick and shook it at them.

"Put down that window!" he returned, in stentorian measure, "or you'll catch your deaths. Put it down! If you don't, I'll turn myself into a snow man and melt."

The cries broke into giggles, and the window went down swiftly. Winterbourne, vainglorious over his own discipline, strode on to the house where he was nobody but Jack, by his own decree, when it had been found that small tongues stuck on the plentiful syllables of his appropriate name. The door had not closed on him when, with a chorus of squeals, the four were upon him: Teeny, the baby, very little, in blue trousers ridiculously small; Tiny, the next, also trousered, who had been the previous year what Teeny was now; Tony, very much of a boy, he thought himself; Tonty, the girl whose hair had begun to be long; and Tim, really grown-up, who lay on the sitting-room sofa with his long legs over the end, figuring on a piece of paper backed against a book. Winterbourne loved the welcome he was getting, three children clinging to his hands and legs and trying to climb up to the vantage-ground of his shoulders, Tonty standing off a step in maiden modesty but looking her shy adoration and her plain desire to be at the climbing, and Tim calling from the sitting-room, —

"Come in here, Jack." He could compass the three syllables, being grown-up, but he liked the privilege of shortening, because it made him more a man. "Come in here before you let those nimshis scuttle you."

They all went in, Tonty now by Tim, saying in her motherly little way, —

"Get up, Tim. You don't want to lie there, and make Jackie come to you."

"Do, too," said Tim.

He said it impudently, but no one would have cared,

because he was such a pleasing youth, with blue eyes, guileless and full of glee, and beauties that fulfilled all the worn poetic similes. It was true that his skin was roses and milk, his hair as yellow as the sun. It curled with a vigor he resented, because it feminized him in a hateful way. Tim was a beautiful youth, although he did not look at all as he could have wished. A black-eyed brigand was the man he would have liked to be. Winterbourne, seeing him in his sun-god radiance, wondered again, as he often had, how Mrs. Jellyby, with her weatherworn skin and her unbused redundances, could have given birth to such glorious children.

The floor about the reclining Timothy was strewn with scraps of paper, all closely figured. He made a sweep of his long arm and gathered them up.

"See here, Jack," said he. "See what I've found out this morning."

Winterbourne, listening, took up the youngest child and settled her on his shoulder, where she sat still, looking gravely down at the others, as if being enthroned were enough. She had no sense of triumph, it was evident, only a grave recognition that fortune had come to her. It might hit any of the others next time, this Olympian shower, but now she was the beloved. Tim was arranging his slips with deft motions of his long white fingers.

"If I had bought a hundred shares of Anakim," he delivered with conviction, "bought it, that is, four weeks ago, I could have sold it in three days and made eight hundred dollars. Then I could have bought two hundred of Long Valley — it was down right then — and made a thousand more. Then —"

Winterbourne, supporting the child with one hand, put out the other and knocked the papers to the floor.

"I'd rather hear you blaspheme," he said, in his intemperate outcry. "I'd rather you'd curse your ancestors and the day you were born than lie here making up fortunes out of the stock-market."

Timothy grinned at him in a fashion as sweet as any girl could compass, and hunched himself upon one side to poke the pillow under his back.

"You're an awful disappointment," said he.

"Disappointment! Go to work, and I shan't be a disappointment. Don't you know the sea, the ocean with a million sails —"

"A million stern-propellers," murmured Timothy.

His beautiful blue eyes, full of laughter, were on Winterbourne's face. But he did not laugh really. He was mostly too lazy to do that.

"The ocean is at your door."

"No, Jackie, it's at the end of Bent Bush Road. It's three good miles."

"The ocean, the sea, man. You can get your living out of it. You could build up an industry, fish, lobsters —"

"You and Dwight had a poor haul out of your lobsters, did n't you? Say, Jack, did n't you?"

"We did," Winterbourne glowered. Another child was clamoring at his knee, and he lifted her with some difficulty and allowed her to dispose herself on his other shoulder. "The lobsters were short. We threw 'em back, like honest fishermen. If we'd been bent on our infernal gains, we should have kept 'em and peddled 'em out to farmers' wives who were glad to get 'em cheap and would n't have told."

"Jack," said Timothy pleasantly, "you're right. You're always right. I ought to go to work. I can't. That's all. I can't."

"Then you can jump into the sea," growled Winterbourne.

"You don't have to lie down in the morning in God Almighty's sunlight and figure up dirty fortunes on paper."

At his first drastic recommendation, Tonty gave a little hurt murmur, seeing in fancy her Timmie disappearing beneath the waves. At once Winterbourne put down the two children gently, both in an arm-chair, to take her small hand in his and give her voiceless comfort. There she stood holding to his fingers, after a little breath of relief, as if she were sure, in that friendly grasp, he could not have the heart to fling Timothy to the deep.

"I don't know," continued Timothy, "whether it's because we're vegetarians, or whether it's because we have n't inherited anything but discontents, but I'm blest if I've got a grain of peth to fight with. I can't work, Jackie. It's the last thing I could do."

"Then buy you a hecatomb of beeves," Winterbourne fulminated. "Sacrifice them and eat them all up, and get some strength into you. Don't come to me with your confounded stock-exchange."

At this point Tonty left him and slipped forward to Tim's ear, where she whispered, —

"Show him some of it, Timmie."

"Bah!" he barked at her like a little dog in a way she usually accepted with ecstasy, it scared her so. But that was at times free from care, not when she was urging him to strengthen himself in the approval of their darling friend. For she it was who knew that when Tim was really happy, actually amusing himself, he did the most beautiful embroidery, on anything he could find, even a window-curtain or the skirt of mother's wedding dress. Tim, for some reason mysterious to her, was ashamed of this. He brought out his silks and needle when he was tired or dull, and then hid them from the light.

But now Winterbourne took her hand again and turned aside, leading her, as if she were a very honored lady with whom he was about to begin a dance, to the room across the hall. This the children had made their own. It was not a nursery by decree, but they had rioted in it and settled themselves impregnably in corners, so that it had been easier for the family to withdraw and leave them eminent domain. The walls had been painted a dark green, and were now a wilderness of maps and animals, done in chalk. Here was the record of all ages. The older ones had tried to learn their geography lessons by trial maps, and the youngest had made the simplest sign-language of man and cow. Once, it was remembered, Tonty, from a housewifely instinct, had started out with a bowl of soapy water to wash the paint, not that the room might be restored to conventional freshness, but that the artistic vandals might find a clearer field for operations; but as she came upon one after another record she had been so wrought upon by the vision of old days that she desisted, and left the medley as it was. The room was chiefly now a treasure-house. If one of them was afraid to trust his outdoor possessions without, he brought them in, however inappropriately they fitted house-furnishings, and there they stayed. There were croquet-balls, an old vane blown down by a September wind, kitchen utensils rescued from the dump because they might serve some unforeseen purpose, and the mixed litter of real toys bought in the market but not so dear as all this stubble from the field of life.

Mrs. Ramsay hardly ever looked into the room now. Though she was brave enough to address meetings and frame resolutions, this she scarcely dared. She called the children to her in other rooms and tried to ignore the certainty that when her back was turned their really happy moments were spent in a limbo of toys gone mad. But they loved the

room and so did Winterbourne. Tonty always kept the hearth brushed, and whenever the weather was cool enough, a fire burning. Winterbourne's big chair was drawn up, as it had been day after day, and there were little chairs and stools also ready, lest there should be a call for them, chiefly because of fairy stories. He took his chair gravely, and Tonty stood beside it for a moment until she could fix the others with her eye. She was mistress of ceremonies and they knew it, but they all meant to evade her if they could. She was a sweet maid, with good brown eyes, an instinct of parted lips that made her very pretty while she listened to you, and, what was to Winterbourne an inexplicable attraction, a colony of freckles on her nose.

"Tony," said she, "it's your turn."

Tony gravely took the stool next Winterbourne.

"Now, Tiny. Now, Teeny. No, you aren't going to crowd. Teeny, you mustn't put out your tongue. There won't be any story if you do."

Winterbourne, also according to custom, rose now and made her a ceremonious bow, indicating the little chair at his right hand.

"Sit there, maidie," he said.

Whereupon Tonty dropped a curtsy with her foot prettily behind her, and took it. They had both found it was highly difficult to settle the others in their places unless Winterbourne was also in his. This insurrectionary surplus seemed to feel that the base of operations might easily change, whereas the quieting effect of a stationary story-teller was evident.

"Once upon a time —" said Winterbourne. Then he put out his hand for Tonty's and she gave him hers. "Once upon a time there was a frightful ogre. And he had a wife who was n't an ogress. She was a lady and very beautiful. And she came to him one day and said 'Ogre, here I am, and

here are two daughters, who are ladies and very beautiful. What are you going to do with us?' "

He ceased, and Tonty, glancing up at him remindingly, saw that he was looking into the fire, not as he often did, in high pleasure as if he expected to find a million things there to make his story better, but as if he had hurt himself or somebody and felt very sad indeed. That was what Tonty never could bear.

"Oh, dear!" she said under her breath.

Tiny, who, though a ridiculous mite, had the greatest understanding among them all of the naughty possibilities of life, inquired ruthlessly, —

"Did he like his wife?"

"No," said Winterbourne hopelessly, as if out of a dream where it would do no harm to tell the truth. "I don't believe he liked her. Oh, I don't know whether he did or not! He never could tell."

"Well," said Tiny, putting her little worn shoes nearer the blaze, "if he didn't like his wife and didn't like his daughters, he'd kill 'em, wouldn't he? Tell now how he killed 'em."

Winterbourne started out of his reverie.

"I didn't say he killed 'em, did I? Did I say that?"

He turned from one to another of the pointed faces, and when he got to Tonty, he sighed in gratitude. She was looking at him with soft eyes and shaking her head.

"No," he said, "of course he didn't kill 'em. I don't know, though. Maybe he killed the daughters. He wouldn't kill his wife. She'd suffered enough already."

"What's suffered?" inquired Tiny, with some difficulty over the word.

But Winterbourne did not, according to his patient wont, pause to answer.

"We could kill the daughters, though," he said hopefully. "There 'd be two of them out of the way. No, by George! we could n't kill 'em both. One of 'em's got to live. She's suffered enough, too. Well, the ogre did kill one of his daughters."

Tiny pulled her feet back from the blaze, put her hands between her knees, and drew her breath sharply with relish.

"How?" she said. "How 'd he kill her? Make it long."

"The ogre took a sack and filled it with barley-meal. And then he called his daughter and said to her, 'Put this barley-meal together until you have grains of barley. And put the grains of barley together until you have heads of barley. And set the barley growing in the field, and set the birds to singing over it—'"

"What kind of birds?" Tony inquired. He was a sportsman and owned a pea-shooter.

"Blackbirds and swallows and bluebirds and robins, those four kinds. 'And if you can't do that,' says the ogre, 'you will be killed and eaten up.'"

Tonty had drawn her hand away from the large one holding it. He thought uneasily that it was done in a mute reproach. Now she spoke quite firmly.

"I could finish it, Jackie."

"No! no! no!" voted the chorusing voices.

But Winterbourne was attending to her very carefully.

"Yes, I guess you 'd better finish it, maidie," he said. "I don't know the end."

"So," said maidie, her eyes upon the fire as she knew a real story-teller's were, because, as Winterbourne had once confided to her, there was magic in the fire, "the little girl—"

"I did n't say she was a little girl," Winterbourne interrupted her. "You must n't say little girl. That makes me sorry for her. You must say just 'daughter.'"

"So the daughter did all those things, and then she did n't have to be killed."

She ended in a triumph at once to be quenched by the gloom about her.

"What's the use of giving stories over to Tonty and letting her bust 'em?" Tony bitterly inquired.

The tears were in Tonty's eyes.

"I have n't ever spoiled one before," she lamented. "I haven't ever tried to finish one."

"That's the reason, then," said Tony. "Come on, Jack. Tell another and keep the girls out of it."

Winterbourne raised himself from the dream of his disordered house in the hands of three wise virgins, and saw that something must be done, or this house also would revolt.

"Come," he said, "all hands on deck. Trojan war. Tony begin, and tell about the beauty of Helen."

It was a kind of game where all the most poetical talk had place. Tony, who would have opened his mouth in scornful laughter or a child's simplicity if the beauty of a modern woman had been cited, gravely began a disquisition on the cause of the Trojan War. He spoke of that he understood not. The rape of Helen became a commonplace on his tongue, and the two younger children listened and clasped their knees with the sense that it was a real story and that Tony was distinguishing himself. Then Tonty had something to say about the delay at Aulis, and Tony was again called upon to describe Achilles sulking in his tent. At intervals, when Winterbourne was especially pleased with their fluency, he was caught up to a heaven where they could not follow, and mouthed strange phrases. Some of the lines Tony caught from him and piped them in his childish voice with a spirit that gave Winterbourne great delight.

"My little dears," said he at length, "you are beginning the path that will lead you to the only world worth living in."

Then they, all except Tonty, feeling in some way that they were very popular and had done something to be greatly commended, climbed upon him and pulled his beard and explored his garments where they found hot strong peppermints. Finally he put them gently down. He rested his hand for a moment on maidie's head and looked at her.

"Good-by, folks," he said. "Good-by, little dears."

They followed him in silence to the door. It was an accepted discipline now that there should be no whimpering, no clamoring to stay. Until a system had been adopted, the air had been piercingly fretted with farewells. Winterbourne had each time gone forth lashed, he had felt, by a rain of tears.

When he got to the end of the garden-path, he looked back again, and there they were as they had been to greet him — four clustering faces, the prettiest of nosegays — at the glass.

He walked home slowly, shy of what he was to find, and went almost stealthily in at his own front door. Catherine came instantly forward to meet him.

"O John," she said, in an agitation imperfectly controlled, "what do you think? Lyddy's locked herself into the kitchen, and we can't any of us get in."

VI

THERE they stood facing each other, the helpless master of the house and the mistress, by legal right and the courtesy of habit, their feet ensnared in a domestic coil. She had not perhaps found time to formulate an expectation of outspoken sympathy, but it never could have presented itself to her that any other emotion was to be awakened by so foolish and yet trying catastrophe. Winterbourne did not look at her. He stared down at the rug and considered, and at length, having stretched her patience to breaking, he opened his lips.

"I don't know what we're going to do," he evolved.

"Don't know what we're going to do?" Her amazement intensified the words. She gasped over them, and they came explosively. "Why, what is there to do?"

"I don't know," said Winterbourne seriously. "That's what I say."

"You don't know? Why, there's but one thing. The woman's crazy. Discharge her."

Winterbourne shook his head.

"No, Catherine, she's not crazy. Besides, I can't discharge her. She's entrenched herself, and she's got all the supplies."

Suddenly his face wrinkled up and he opened his lips to a loud peal of that consecutive laughter poetically called Homeric. His wife looked at him in a pained perplexity, as if she dared not, without consideration, tell what she really thought. Winterbourne sobered, and glanced at her kindly, but still as if it were only their common misfortune that Lyddy was shut up in the kitchen.

"Poor old devil," he was saying in his beard. "You've got to be sorry for her. You can't let yourself be anything else. It's her kingdom. She's reigned over it till she's old. Now here you come in your slippery dresses —" She had no idea what he meant here, but he was really trying to convey his own terror of the sound of silk petticoats under cloth. "It's scared her almost to death."

"I see. You want us to go away."

The pathetic eyes sought his, not reproachfully, but with extreme mournfulness. Winterbourne made haste to answer them.

"Good Lord, no, I don't. Yes, I do, too. That is, I wish you had n't wanted to come. You did want it. And it's best. You can live here on what you'd spend in carriages in New York. It's right. It's best. But you've got to give us time to get used to it. And Lyddy's in the kitchen."

How to get her out. He put his hand to his beard and thought, and at that instant some one came down the stairs with a pace of quick and trained activity. Winterbourne stared at the girl. He thought he had never seen her before. But in an instant he cried out, —

"Why, it's Bess!" And then, "Where did you get that gown?"

She was carrying a broom, and she stopped before him and raised quiet eyes to his. When he had first seen her, she had been pale, with no sickly pallor but rather a hue of despondency. Now the blood seemed to have flooded all the farthest cells of her and wakened them to a glowing life.

"Where did you get that gown?" Winterbourne repeated, in a persistent interest.

She looked down at it with a pleasure of her own. It was a brown gingham of a neat pattern, made with a simple waist

and plain skirt. Her sleeves were rolled high from the roundest arms he thought he had ever seen. They looked like strong arms, too. She glanced deprecatingly now at Catherine as if, from that quarter, blame might be expected.

"It's my dress," she said. "I brought it with me."

She spoke as if it were especially hers, and all the others that had been slipped on her after she left her humble estate were troublesome lendings. Winterbourne nodded, pleased with her.

"That was the dress you washed the floor in," he commented.

She turned to him with that look of earnest inquiry.

"I washed a good many floors in it," she said simply, and her voice faltered.

Winterbourne looked for tears in those eyes, too, feminine tears were so mysteriously imminent; but their steady clarity was undisturbed. She addressed Catherine now.

"I could n't find any dust-pan. I swept the dirt into the fire."

Catherine shook her head, and for some unformulated reason took the broom away from her.

"Have you got your hair all full of dust?" she asked.

"Do you remember it was shampooed only yesterday?"

"I pinned a towel over it," said the girl dutifully. "But I wish I could find the dust-pan."

There was a melancholy cadence in her voice, and Winterbourne, hearing it, thought at once of Philomela weeping for her kindred and Cephalus for Procris, and burst out laughing. She turned to him now, shamefacedly, as if she were not used to pleasing of late and could blame nobody for it, and Winterbourne sobered.

"The dust-pan is probably in the kitchen," he said. "But you can't get in there. The door is bolted. Lyddy Pendle-

ton stands within, her arm stretched from casing to panel like Katherine Barlass of old."

"Oh!" said Bess, not smiling. She took back the broom and went on through the sitting-room with it while Catherine shook her head distastefully.

"Do you see how she's returned to type?" she said to him, in a tone cautiously lowered. "Do you? Here she is dressed like a lady — or she was when she came — waiting for a chance to make herself a career, and what does she do? She drags that disgraceful gown out of a trunk where she's had it stowed, nobody knows why, and she's happier in it than she's been all these months that Celia and I've been working on her."

"That's a good dress," said Winterbourne, still chuckling at the lament for the lost dust-pan. "There's nothing the matter with that dress."

"I tell you she's returned to type."

"Well, where's Celia? Has she returned to type, too?"

A look of satisfaction lighted her.

"Celia is at the desk in the west room, the only clear spot she can find. She's arranging the circular we mean to send round to women's clubs about Lilian."

"Who's Lilian?"

They had walked through into the dining-room, and now she turned and looked at him as if she found him daft.

"Lilian? why, Lilian is Celia's sister. You've just been talking to her."

"No, I have n't," said Winterbourne. "I've been talking to Bess Hartwell, plain, pretty Bess Hartwell. I adore her already. And look at her!"

The dining-room was in the main part of the square house and the kitchen extending from it, at right angles, had two windows and a door, commanded by the one back dining-

room window. While they looked, Bess was about lifting one of the kitchen windows by its lower sash. Her broom leaned against the wall. She now mounted an old chair that had been sitting in the shed, and stepped from it lightly through the window. Winterbourne looked at his wife, and drew a breath.

"That girl," said he, "has gone into the arena. She's a Christian martyr."

"Well," said Catherine practically, "now she can open the door. Go and try it, and if she has n't unfastened it already, call to her."

Winterbourne put a restraining hand on her arm. His face worked, but his tone was all solemnity.

"No, Catherine. You come with me. I'll show you prints of Tristram Shandy I found in the attic, or I'll repeat poetry to you. I've been learning it for the Jellybys. But you can't interfere between the lioness and the martyr. I won't have it."

He took her by the arm, and she had to go back into the sitting-room where there was a fire on a clean hearth. Winterbourne looked about him suddenly. The room had a colder air, yet it was pleasant, too. He had never seen the tiles of the hearth glow more ruddily. Suspicion fell upon him.

"Has she been sweeping here?" he asked.

Catherine had disposed herself prettily in Lovell's arm-chair, and now put out her foot to the blaze.

"I dare say," she returned, with a studied negation.

Winterbourne, laying on a stick, smiled broadly.

"I believe she has," he said to himself. "What a little devil for brooms and dust-pans!"

Bess, one foot in the kitchen, stayed poised for a moment and looked about her. The kitchen itself, in its mellow

tints and the suggestiveness of comfortable uses, pleased her. She saw a dozen things that could be done for its bettering, either in cleanliness or convenience; but her eye could not stay for that. It sought out the bent old figure in the chair by the hearth, and her feet took her to it. Lyddy looked the picture of inconsolable and silent grief. She had done none of her tasks. The fire had gone down, and her dishes, for lack of hot water, were unwashed. She felt herself inundated and almost drowned by the influx of new things, and the cruelty of it, now she was so near death, was overwhelming to her. Bess halted by her chair. There was indignation and ruth in her pink face. She looked down at the gaunt calico-covered shoulder and forbore to touch it.

"We're not going to stay," said she.

Lyddy gave no sign of hearing.

"She would n't stay for a thousand dollars," the young voice went on. Lyddy knew unerringly that she meant Catherine. "You could n't hire her to."

The homely speech meant something to Lyddy. She gave a little grunt and a lurch in her chair.

"You need n't do anything for us," the girl continued, her keen glance ready to note every responsive change in the bowed figure. "You can cook for him. I could n't suit him. You know all his ways." She paused an instant for that shaft to strike. "I'll cook for them, his wife and Celia. You let me. I'll clear up everything I get round. You need n't open the kitchen door if you don't want to. I'll take things out through the window."

"Don't be a fool," said Lyddy.

Bess felt encouragement.

"Truly you need n't," she averred. "What's the use of having folks round underfoot in the kitchen? You let me blaze up the fire. Come!"

Lyddy turned her eyes, almost lost in their map of wrinkles, up to her and looked her slowly over. The eyes travelled from her face down the brown shoulder to the round, strong arm. Then they went back to the face again.

"You some o' their help?" she asked.

"I've been help all my life, here and there," said Bess. "I'm going to put in some wood."

She did it with a practised hand while Lyddy watched her. Not a movement, as the old woman saw, went amiss. While the water heated, the new maid piled dishes and washed off the kitchen table. Lyddy, vaguely soothed by the accustomed sound of the fire, got up, after a while, and herself put in a stick.

"I'll do that," she said.

Bess was lifting the cloth over the rising bread, with a wise finger-poke to test the lightness. Immediately she left it, and while she washed dishes Lyddy moulded bread.

"What is there for dinner?" asked the girl at length. "I could make 'em an omelet."

Lyddy answered gruffly, —

"I can make it myself. You can go into t' other part how. The table-cloths are in the press in the back entry."

"I'll set the table when it's time," Bess told her gravely.

She unbolted the door into the dining-room and left Lyddy to her tasks.

Winterbourne and his wife were still before the fire, she talking earnestly and he holding Lovell's book in his hand and remembering he must get it to him lest Lovell, who would never venture into this vortex, should miss it sorely. Bess made her declaration briefly and with great simplicity.

"She does n't want anybody in the kitchen," she announced to Winterbourne.

"No." He nodded in a grave concurrence. "That's fair enough."

His wife took up the case, with her conclusive air of mastery.

"Not want anybody in the kitchen? You've just been in yourself, Lilian?"

"I've been helping," said the girl. "She won't mind me. I'm her kind."

Mrs. Winterbourne turned to her husband.

"John," said she, "how long is this going to last?"

He was wondering, knowing that it would last as long as the invaders chose. But he answered temperately, with a knowledge of her side of it and also a concern over it,—

"You give Lyddy her head. It isn't much to ask, this going into the kitchen, now is it? What do you want to go into the kitchen for?"

"Lilian," said Mrs. Winterbourne, "will you put on a decent dress and come in here and sit down?"

The girl looked at her with eyes beseeching pardon.

"I can't," she said. "I've got to help get dinner."

Then she disappeared and they heard the opening and shutting of drawers in the back hall where she was examining the stores of linen.

Winterbourne talked hard and consecutively in the next hour, to keep his wife's attention in channels sufficiently remote from kitchen sieges. Perhaps he told her things he might otherwise have kept hidden. For instance, he said he must go down to Jim Lovell's that afternoon and carry his Theocritus.

"I remember Mr. Lovell perfectly," his wife responded. "He wrote poetry. Does he write any now?"

There was that terrifying gleam in her eye, the responsive spark in the modern woman at the mention of accomplish-

ment. Winterbourne had forgotten some things about her. Once he would have known that the proximity of a poet meant the pursuit of him for the illegitimate purposes of autographs and teas. Yet he answered her unguardedly, —

“He writes some, I believe. Jim does n’t publish. He’s the one creature I know that’s living his own life.”

“Does n’t publish? Why not? Is he too timid?”

“Yes, I guess Jim’s timid — before certain things.”

“He ought to be pushed. He ought to have somebody to push him.”

“Oh, no, he ought n’t. If you pushed him, you’d push him into an abyss, the one where all the asses are struggling for notoriety. Why, see here!” In his vindication of Lovell he forgot his caution toward her. She seemed to be a certain part of the eager world judging a man who was not of its kind. “Lovell had some money left him, a couple of years ago. It was a good warm lump. To-day there is n’t a sign of his having it. He lives in his little garden house —”

“Garden house? What’s that?”

“It’s a little house built for the help when his grandfather was bringing up his eight children and wanted the big house for them. Jim lets the big house stand idle, and Mary Manahan helps him do his work in the little one.”

“Shocking!”

“No, it is n’t shocking, Catherine. He is n’t like me. I collect dirt and I sit down and thrive in it. Lovell’s as neat as a bee, in the cleanest unpopulated hive you ever saw. What’s all this nonsense about women’s housekeeping? That is n’t a sacred trust. A man can keep house as well as a woman. Some of ’em do. Lovell does.”

She was not heeding him. The moment he touched upon abstract defence of the housekeeping male she was off on more personal considerations of her own.

"But where is the money?" she mused.

He looked at her frowning at the irrelevance of her curiosity.

"Money? I don't know."

"The money that was left him."

"That is n't the point. The point is that Lovell did n't use it to bathe in as some of them do and wash away all his natural qualities. He stayed unchanged, just as he was when he was teaching the academy here and writing verses. That's what I'm trying to tell you."

"Do you suppose he gave it away?"

Winterbourne took his chair-arms in a mighty grip and seemed to lift himself and the chair with him by a kind of inner convulsion.

"Jupiter, Saturn, the Earth and Mars! Don't I tell you I don't know? Don't I tell you it's not my business or yours either?"

"Is he of a philanthropic disposition? Is he interested in the arts?"

Winterbourne relaxed his grasp and seemed, by an effort, to bind himself to the chair. Now his only thought was of protecting Lovell's inner mind from the assaults of a telepathic curiosity. Lovell's solitude was so precious to him that he could never fancy putting a question to disturb it; even a fantastic care had to be observed where an outer world threatened to break in. It was impossible to classify his friend because if he denied him one set of qualities she was sure to trip him on that side.

"Lovell has n't any disposition at all," he said, out of his fervor of discretion. "He's neither charitable nor uncharitable. You know what Lyddy said about the soap-grease man. She said he had n't a trait in his character. That's Jim Lovell."

"You don't mean your friend has been a soap-grease man?"

Winterbourne ground his teeth at her and gripped at the chair-arms again.

"I am embroidering my talk with pearls of rhetoric," he said. "I am borrowing from Lyddy to describe Lovell the more graphically. I tell you he has n't a trait in his character."

"Is he as negative as that?"

Winterbourne rumbled a laugh and gazed piously at the fire.

"That's Lovell," said he.

"How could he be a poet?"

"Well, maybe Jim is n't so very much of a poet."

"I must make a point of meeting him."

Winterbourne turned upon her.

"No, you won't, Catherine. I don't let Jim in for that."

"Do you mean you don't want me to meet your friends?"

"Not Lovell. Besides, you can't. There's something the matter with him."

"What is it?"

Winterbourne considered whether Lovell's unique and roundabout precaution to avoid social feats would do here, in the face of such an eager huntress. Was it enough to be deaf? She would ask if he had learned the lip language and volunteer teaching it to him.

"He is n't seeing people, that's all," he hammered obstinately. "Jim's not up to it."

"He's not tubercular?"

"Lord!" Now he could only groan.

"In that case I should feel very seriously about his meeting the girls."

"Jim is n't going to meet the girls, or any girls. It's precisely what I told you."

"I believe he's tubercular. Does he take the open-air treatment?"

At that instant, with the swish and rustle of the silk Winterbourne hated, but which he welcomed now for a diversion, Celia came in from the next room. She had pencil and paper in hand, and she perched herself on the arm of his chair and displayed the sheets to him.

"Papa," said she, in the cosiest way, "you know all about punctuation and proof-reading and things, don't you?"

"Papa" was an innovation. She had been taught to say "father" soberly, and although it wore for him an ironic flavor he did not really mind. But the diminutive made him wriggle mentally and wish the feminine did not have to express itself in mosaic. She was offering him the sheets more definitely.

"These are Lilian's songs, her little repertory. I'm making out an announcement for clubs. What do you think?"

Winterbourne fumbled for his eyeglasses, and she found them for him, with odious quickness, pounced delicately, and seemed about to set them on his nose. But their clouded state struck her, and she made a pretty face.

"I'm going to rub them!" she announced, with a bright suggestion of usefulness that made him wince. He saw it going further and further, into his desk even, and ordering his papers about. She was breathing on the glasses in a charming hurry, and now she rubbed them with her little handkerchief. "There!" she said.

Winterbourne felt that he really could n't endure it if she put them on his nose, and took them from her. He accepted the sheet of paper and looked at it.

"*Batti! batti!* ' Really? Does that child know Italian?"

"Oh, no, only enough to sing. She learns her songs, you know."

"Oh!" He scanned it again, frowning, and gave it back to her. "Yes," he said, "your words are all right. But it seems to me a poor slatternly way to do."

"What, papa?"

"To learn like a parrot and sing what you don't know the meaning of."

"But she does, in a way. She's been taught the — why, the kind of emotion that goes with them, and it's perfectly easy to put it in. It ought to be easy, I should say," she added as a wondering afterthought, remembering how impossible her sister found it to warm at call.

If Celia had had the voice, she knew she would by this time have had also money and a name. It was bitter to her that her sister showed no sign of earning either. She wanted them for Lilian who did not crave them for herself, and, it sometimes seemed, wilfully forbore to work for them.

"It's bad business," Winterbourne was saying, "cheap, miserable business jockeying with a language when you have n't learned to respect it."

"Is n't that interesting, papa?" she recalled herself from her musings to say brightly. "It's so quaint."

Winterbourne thought over that in a puzzled helplessness. He had never been in the set where she had moved at intervals, chiefly in travelling, and no one had told him that a part of the modern game of smartness lies in the using of words outside their natal meaning. He was to learn that Celia, with a steadfast will, conformed seriously, even in little ways, to what the world thought prettiest. It was always, now, for Lilian. Often she got quite tired of fitting herself to dull conformities; but how otherwise should she make a way for Lilian up that difficult path? Winterbourne did not know this now, its pathos and its weariness. He only wished she would get off the arm of his chair and take a seat like a lady,

or help her sister who was still stirring about the dining-room. He was human enough in his softness toward lovely things, and a young girl's caressing dutifulness might easily have seemed moving to him ; but Celia, because his wife had moulded her, was a part of the exactingness of trivial duties. She, like his wife, was a policeman despatched from the pleasant social world to arrest him in the midst of his innocent pursuits and drag him back to some hideous service before the gods that world worshipped.

As they sat there in silence for a moment, a sound arose from the next room, a song most movingly simple, in a voice borne upon a wind of content, as if the singer were happy about little tasks. Celia sat so still that she seemed to be holding a hand upon her heart to bid it beat more softly. The color flushed her face. She looked adorably happy and eager. This was the first time, she knew, that they had heard her sister voluntarily singing since she had been captured and put in a cage to sing. Winterbourne felt the hot tears in his eyes, brought there as only the great heroic things had ever brought them. A picture sprang before him of the old life he loved, of honey in jars, and bread and wine, of "our brother the ox," and simple content, of dreams of the unconquered earth and islands yet to find. And at that moment the song ceased and Bess came in, still in her brown serving-dress, though the sleeves were down, and said to them with a simple courtesy, "Dinner's ready."

Celia for an instant did not move, her sister looked so different to her. The cowed and patient air was gone. She had a gay color and a lovely light was in her eyes. They would never sparkle and gleam like Celia's own, because they had only a gentle unconscious humor to express ; but they glowed now, with a subdued fire. Celia rose, threw her paper and pencil on the table, and put an arm about her.

Bess smiled faintly at her, as if she loved her without much hope of making it evident in quite the right way, but as Celia gave her a little spontaneous hug, she did light a little more brightly, and they went out into the dining-room behind Winterbourne and his wife.

Mrs. Winterbourne, when she saw the table, gave a sigh of pleasure. At last, it said, some magic had been wrought upon the ruin. Civilization had been brought into it. In spite of the yellowed linen, the table was almost, in a simple way, perfection. There were even flowers, a few yellow crocuses in a glass. Lyddy and Bess together had conjured up a soup, for both of them knew the art of mixing the remnants of another day and enlivening them with condiments. Bess moved in and out, serving them, and took her place when they were helped. Catherine looked a remonstrance at that, but remembering the locked door and the kitchen's potential impregnability, evidently made up her mind to accept it for the present satisfactory moment and bring about justice when she could.

Winterbourne found he liked the atmosphere. Here was a table and a fire burning on the hearth, here were three pretty women to look at. As he ate he warmed, and forgot, for a moment, the curtailment of his liberties. It was Celia who led the talk, with charming insincerities of interest in what, Winterbourne knew, did not fit her actual tastes. But he was being fed and munificently forgave her; he need not listen very hard. One touch of nature there was in her real curiosity about Dwight Hunter. He was quite unusual, she proclaimed; but when it was explained to her that he was not really an expressman or really a ploughman, except by choice, and that he had a college career behind him, she seemed to welcome the harmonizing of things.

"That explains it," she said, with great satisfaction.

"Explains what?" Winterbourne asked.

"Why, he's a gentleman. Lilian, didn't you feel that he was a gentleman?"

The other girl always seemed to respond patiently when she was called Lilian; but she was bringing in the omelet, evidently soothed in all ways by its completeness, and could answer out of that primary interest, "I didn't know."

"What is a gentleman?" asked Winterbourne.

VII

LOVELL was lost without his friend and his evening haunt. For the last three years he had spent several hours of every day with Winterbourne, keeping pace with him, approximately, in Greek ; and when Winterbourne dropped off after his wife got home, Lovell felt bereft. He stepped about his little camping house, — a long living-room, a bedroom and a kitchen, — and even after Mary Manahan had done her daily adjusting in an ever-fresh domain, made himself homespun tasks, then to settle down in the austere quiet of it, to read and write. He had a hatred of disorder in the measure of Winterbourne's tolerance of it, and his little shell, though it was wholly lacking in touches of ornamentation, gave a feeling of light and space. A workman of any sort, in the arts, or even a lover of the aspects of life, would have been happy there. It had two requisites of beauty and comfort : the fireplaces were large and the furniture was old. Lovell, a hermit in a village way, had not thought before how much he depended on Winterbourne for the bread of life, — silent accord, great laughter, kindred tastes. Perhaps without him and his own careless days undisturbed by womenfolk or concession to civil demands, he might not have been living so contentedly in his little house, mirthfully escaping ladies who forced upon him gentle hospitalities. Winterbourne had, without effort, made the eccentric way seem perfectly feasible and natural : to Hunter, also, who lived alone, when he was not driving about the country on his various missions, he too relying on Mary Manahan to keep for him a pretence of outer comfort.

On the fifth night, when Lovell was settling to his book, — a solitary pursuit now, almost become a task, — Winterbourne came. Lovell heard him pounding down the path, an offshoot from the driveway to the great house, threw open the door, and stood there, an image of the ready host. It was a night suddenly cold, and Winterbourne had resumed his winter greatcoat with the cape. He wore a slouch hat and carried a stick; he was a picturesque figure of another time when, even in men's attire, the flowing line prevailed. He came in silently, laid his books on the table, and threw aside his coat.

Lovell, in his anticipation of renewed comradeship, looked quite boyish. His eyes glowed and his sanguine cheeks had color. These last nights the room had been expectant of Winterbourne's coming, table ready to be drawn up, two chairs waiting by it, and the mugs yawning for beer.

Winterbourne threw himself into one of the chairs and drew a long breath. He wrinkled his forehead as if pathetically remembering forsaken cares, and then looked about the room. He spoke interrogatively and with a suggestion of weariness, —

"I guess we shall like this just as well, Jim?"

Lovell nodded. It was to be perfectly recognized between them that Winterbourne's own house had been rendered uninhabitable by the advent of sprightliness and beauty. Lovell laid his hand upon a book.

"Ready?" he asked.

Winterbourne was too tired with some subtle weariness of nerve or spirit. He did not answer, but sat soaking in the quiet of the place.

"Hunter's there all the time," he volunteered.

"At your house?"

"I believe he likes it. He moves furniture and puts up

curtains. They 're putting up curtains, Jim, over the whole damned place."

"By George!"

Lovell glanced about his own living-room and thought how clever he had been to abjure a curtain-breeding creature there. But Winterbourne, head raised, was looking at him as if he had in that instant made a discovery.

"It is n't the curtains," he said. "I vow I believe it is n't the curtains."

"What is it?"

The pregnant "it" was, Lovell knew, his discontent at the general complexion life had suddenly assumed.

"The curtains are well enough. I don't know but I think they soften the light a little. It's what they stand for."

He was going too fast now, for Lovell had not learned exactly what species of womankind the marauders were. He had even stayed out of the public streets as much as possible and taken to the spongy woods, because he was afraid of meeting them. Winterbourne was regarding him solemnly.

"I have an idea," he said, "that when they've got the curtains all up,—that won't be yet: Bess is sitting in a low chair hemming them with little stitches,—when the curtains are done and up, they'll give a tea."

The two men exchanged a glance of solemn meaning, Lovell's all commiseration, knowing what his friend foresaw, and Winterbourne's prophetic of what Lovell, too, was in for.

"They're going to rope you in, my boy," he announced. "They're on your trail."

Lovell looked nervously about him.

"What's the use of talking that way, Winterbourne,"

he said, with a false courage. "I don't go to teas. Everybody knows I don't go to teas."

"Man alive, you've written poetry."

"That was years ago. I can't be hauled up now for that old offence."

"The volume is on tables all over this town. My wife has seen it. She saw it in Mrs. Jellyby's sitting-room. Do you want me to show you what kind of a woman my wife is? She wrote Mrs. Jellyby a note, and it kept Mrs. Jellyby at home a whole forenoon. What do you think of that for a triumph? I went to see the kids as usual, and they were all crying like murder because their mother was going to dress them up so my wife could inspect them when she called."

Lovell was not acutely interested in the Ramsays, but only in his own prospects of escaping teas for as long as he could imagine time to last.

"I scooped up as many of the kids as I could carry and retreated into the orchard with them," Winterbourne brooded. "I was n't going to have them crammed into their best tuckers and used for a show, poor little men and women."

"I don't see what they want of the children," Lovell said, in a tone of similar gloom, as if the purposes of womankind bent on social schemes were nefarious, to be unravelled. They might have been ogres hungry for children. Nor did Winterbourne see. He knew Celia professed an interest in the children, and thought it human in her and sweet, but it was beyond his guessing that Celia, in this campaign for her sister's advancement, eagerly and with a pitiful care sought out the means to please.

"My wife called on Mrs. Jellyby," he continued, unfolding as if before his own mind also the facts he had not

been able to correlate in the fever of their happening. "She said she must do it in the forenoon because Mrs. Jellyby would be away every afternoon about her public duties. She said she had to call herself because she could n't wait for Mrs. Jellyby to call."

"Why could n't she?" Lovell thought he could have waited a long time for that consummation.

"Because Mrs. Jellyby is a great woman."

This Winterbourne delivered with the air of making an exact quotation and Lovell had nothing to return but "Oh!" Now Winterbourne laid his hand upon the books. "Come," said he, "let's get to work." But they were not yet forgetfully absorbed in the flow of sound when Winterbourne looked up again. "Jim," said he, as if he might have to quarrel with somebody, "should you say Mrs. Jellyby's a great woman?"

Lovell looked at him blankly and shook his head. That seemed to be sufficient and they relinquished the subject as if it were a heaviness they plumped back into the sea, a bad uneatable fish that might be allowed to live because nobody could tackle him, and turned to their books.

An hour or so later there was a step at the door.

"That's Dwight," said Winterbourne, stopping in his reading.

"No, it's not Dwight. He'd come in."

The visitor knocked instead, and Lovell went to the door. It was Tim Ramsay, looking very lank in a loose greatcoat, the collar turned up to his ears and his hands buried in the pockets. He wore a queer cap of Tony's because his own could not be found, — Tony had explained that he had that afternoon been playing Prince Rupert's men with it, — and it turned him into a handsome bright-eyed wood-creature of an older time than ours, — the

time that could offer a faun or a satyr in the dancing lights.

"Just let me in, Lovell," he said, "if you've got a fire. It's a horrible night for spring."

Lovell closed the door after him and Winterbourne looked kindly up at him while he stood on the hearth and warmed his long white hands.

"The way I hate the cold!" said Tim. He tossed his cap into the wood-basket with an emphatic precision. "I'd rather starve than feel a shiver. I'd rather hear one of mother's speeches. I'd rather anything."

"What are you out in it for?" Jim inquired inhospitably.

But he had drawn forward another chair and now heaped the fire. He kept a store of apple-tree brush in the kitchen, and some of that he brought in for the sudden heat and glow.

Tim had thawed a little, and now he looked handsome in his perfection of color, handsome and audacious.

"Jackie," said he, "how's ear-trumpets?"

"Has that got round?" said Winterbourne, with the air of settling it as a topic. "I gave a trumpet to a woman that was raging up and down the night screaming because her mother was deaf."

"I know it. Her name's Ann Staples. She's Lyddy's cousin. She and Lyddy don't speak. Her mother's had a fight with Lyddy, and they've moved away to Sacker's Falls because Lyddy owns half their house here and the front entry can't be divided and they won't go out of half Lyddy's front door, and they won't not go out because that makes it seem as if Lyddy had the rights on 't."

"Come, come, Lovell," Winterbourne beat in impatiently.

"Let's get to work."

"Got another trumpet, Jackie?" Tim was insisting.

"Ear-trumpets are not like pocket handkerchiefs, silly Billy. I don't create 'em by the dozen."

"Have n't you a model, Jackie? How did you have this one made, if you did n't have a model?"

"Yes, I had a model, Timothy. But that trumpet was made many a year ago. I invented it for my mother, and she used it for two years, and she said they were the happiest years of her old age."

Winterbourne had forgotten his book at last. He sat brooding into the fire, and Lovell, who knew he was thinking of a vanished time, was also silent, because he, too, had such things to muse upon. But Tim was not silent. His mother was very much alive in some region, uncharted for him, giving a lecture; and mothers were not, according to his experience, matters for sentiment.

"Where's your model, Jackie?" he persisted.

Winterbourne turned upon him.

"Why, you young gadfly," he demanded, "can't you drop a thing when it's done? No, I have n't a model. If I had one, and I suppose I did, to have the thing made, it's gone to blazes long ago. I have n't thought of it for years. They've both been down here—both of 'em—in the old house, ever since mother stopped using 'em."

"Both, Jackie? Got another one?"

"Yes, I've another one. Mother got so nervous with only one between her and the void I had to have her another made to keep her quiet. I got one out for Lyddy one day when she said the robins did n't sing as they used to. She was mad as a hornet."

Tim was curving his handsome face into droll grimaces. Lovell, it was evident, had become the object of his mirth.

"Mother says poor Mr. James Lovell has an affliction in

his deafness," he threw in impishly. "I never noticed you were deaf, Jim."

"It's intermittent," Lovell answered.

Timothy looked very alert, bright of eye and color. Winterbourne, scanning him with his kindly, absent glance, thought he was what Lyddy would call a likely boy, but poor in wind and blood, lacking the physical endurance that leads to mental stamina.

Another step struck the doorstone and the door opened to Dwight Hunter. He was not cold in his short leather jacket with the collar turned back from his flannel shirt.

"Good boy, Hunter!" Winterbourne called like a view-halloo.

Lovell drew in the beer from a porch where it had been cooling. He brought mugs and some store supplies of crackers and cheese, and they made a semicircle about the hearth. Hunter was on his way down for the mail, he said. Mrs. Winterbourne wanted it particularly.

"Jackie, is that Celia's sister?" Tim was asking, with a new and alert interest.

"Is what Celia's sister?"

"The darling girl with the brown eyes. She came to the door when I called at your house just now."

"No. It was Lyddy."

"Lyddy! Lyddy! I guess so. Tell that to the pimperlins on the lea."

"It's Lyddy's business to go to the door," said Winterbourne, with a gruff implication. "There are no females at my house known as darling girls."

"Oh," croaked Timothy, "that all? Well, she was a darling girl, just the same."

Hunter looked as if he thought small things of Tim, and could have mentioned some of them if he would. Young as he

was and splendidly attuned to the call of life, he had never before plunged so eagerly into the small intimacies of domestic happenings. It was a new thing for him to be setting a house in order for gracious ladies with pretty ways who seemed to think of everything he did in terms of the most abounding gratitude. Two of them, at least, were so responsive. The other was softly quiet, but when tasks were to be done, she played into his hands with an unaffected readiness that made things move. The thought of the three women hurried him to get back to them. He drained his mug and set it by, rising as he did it.

"I'm going to be down at the shack for two or three days," he said.

Winterbourne knew there was business in that pleasure.

"What for?" he asked.

"I've got to do some things to it. Put a new sill under the west end. If I don't do it now there won't be time all summer. You don't want to come along, do you?" He included Lovell and Winterbourne in his glance. "You could go clamming when the tide serves. I should have a horse down there, and you might rattle up the clams for the express, one of you. I shan't come back nights. We could have a blanket apiece on the floor."

This was philanthropy. Hunter loved to play with his mates, but he had a hidden purpose in taking Winterbourne away from his own house until it should be rehabilitated. Hunter thought it quite natural for three dear ladies to want to make their surroundings bloom like themselves. He had an idea that when Winterbourne got fairly broken to harness he would like it as well as anybody, and it hurt his newly recognized ideals tremendously to see ladies working at such odds, tacking down rebellious carpet-corners, mending chair-cushions, while the lion of the household kept growl-

ing out his dissatisfaction. Hunter would have said that all three ladies were working pathetically hard, but somehow when he conjured up the vision of them it was only Bess he saw in humble postures.

"Let me go, Dwight," said Timothy, from the chair where he sat hunched together. "I never've been on any of your touts. I'm going."

"No, you're not, Tim," said Hunter, standing for his last staring moment by the fire.

"Why ain't I?"

"Ain't invited."

"Oh, come, Dwight, I'm going."

"Can't let you, Timmy. You'd be cold."

He went off clanging the door behind him and whistling down the walk, and Tim sulked patently, until he brightened with a thought.

"I'm going anyway, Jackie," said he pleasantly. "You'll stand by me."

After he, too, had gone, the other men settled down to their reading and made a quiet night of it. But when Winterbourne got home at something after two, he found his wife by the fire waiting for him. She had on what he called some kind of a soft loose thing that gave her an air of domesticity. She wore the look he deplored in her because it tired him, a bright readiness as if she never slept. While she was smiling at him in the wifely manner that meant to carry no reproach, he found himself saying, —

"Get to bed. Get to bed. How do you expect to be a healthy woman if you don't have your sleep?"

"I could n't imagine where you were," she said irrelevantly.

"I went down to Lovell's to smoke a pipe and read. I might have told you."

He would have liked to smoke another pipe by his own fire, but that would have put lead into her shoes, and he stood, waiting for her to go. She was gazing down at the floor, thinking. Presently she looked up.

"When am I going to meet your Lovell?" she inquired.

"Meet Lovell? You can't meet Lovell. Nobody can, as you call meeting. He's invisible. He does n't exist."

"Oh, yes, he does." She was affecting something merry to persuade him and it tired him instead. "I shall do it some time. Don't you think it's rather selfish of you two to have your readings all by yourselves? Let us come. It would be lovely for the girls."

Winterbourne looked at her in a speechless wonder. When he spoke, it was very gently, because he distrusted his own voice: —

"Let me put out the light, Catherine. Run up to bed."

"Good-night," she said.

She had reached the door, the old feeling of defeat upon her, the certainty that if they could pass through a veil, a fog, they might meet face to face. But she tried too hard to pierce it, and it enfolded her the more.

"I'm off early in the morning," he said, good-natured enough now that she would go.

"Where?"

"To Hunter's shack. We're going to camp there for a few days, he and Jim and I."

"We'll come down and call on you." It was radiant suggestion from her undimmed freshness of approach.

"Don't you do it, Catherine." He forbade it wearily. "We're going carpentering and clamming. We shall be all plastered over with gurry. You stay here and weave your web and ravel it out again."

She was standing in the doorway, pale from her vigil and

appealingly sweet, and she lifted her eyes to him while he came with the lamp to light her way.

"What shall I ravel it for?" she asked, with a settled wistfulness. "There are n't any suitors."

Her eager subtlety, her readiness to meet him, was one of the things that separated them. If she would be content to blur the edges a little, to forget, to leave the foolish past to itself and welcome every day's sunrising, they could have had pleasant human intercourse. She was determined, he saw, to speak by the card. That was the kind of readiness society had given her, the limbo where it was necessary to cap one phrase by another.

"Then I shan't see you again," she was saying, as she looked back at him.

"No," he returned, with the loud cheerfulness that aims to reassure. "Good-night!"

VIII

WINTERBOURNE had gone, and his house settled down into that especial peace which attends the avocations of the mice when their enemy is removed. Catherine, with the forever-undone task of charming her husband no longer in hand, relapsed into the disordered kingdom of tired nerves, and Celia ran over the house after her sister, reminding her to practise. Bess, for the first time denying her captors anything, omitted to comply. The word was gently said, but it was final. She could not practise, she explained, while there was so much work on hand. Nor could she travel back and forth to the city to be manicured and have her hair waved. She would not even change her dress save from one serviceable neatness to another. Then said Catherine,—

“At least, Lilian, you must preserve your hands. It’s perfectly dear of you to help us out,—and as for Lyddy, I should think she’d adore the ground you walk on,—but you must work in gloves.”

Returned to household verities, Bess found a courage she had modestly conserved in Catherine’s field of administration. Now she spoke, in a tone all softness, yet immutable.

“You can’t work in gloves.”

She had been counselled to call Catherine mother, but though she responded with a grateful “Thank you,” as to an invitation, she had, with some skill, avoided doing it, and her denuded form of direct address sounded to Catherine wilfully harsh. Here was another, Catherine thought grievously, who had no love for her.

When Mrs. Ramsay sacrificed an afternoon really due at a committee meeting in town, and came to call upon them, Bess herself went to the door. Mrs. Ramsay standing there on the step, large, uncorseted, but handsome with her sincere eyes and worn face, careless that her clothes were of the fashion of years long gone, ignorant that dolmans no longer held a universal sway, and that a fichu revealing a middle-aged throat was not permissible, asked, at the pace of one who has far more miles to trot before sundown than her common-sense shoes could compass, for Mrs. Winterbourne, and seemed not to know she was addressing one of Mrs. Winterbourne's daughters. Bess led her into the parlor, and sought out Catherine in Celia's room considering neckwear, wretchedly ironed by the town laundress, and needing, Bess saw, with a professional eyebeam, a "going over."

"Change your waist and come down," Catherine bade her, and Celia affectionately added, —

"Your skirt, too, dear. You can't see anybody in that."

When Catherine and Celia entered the sitting-room, Mrs. Ramsay was using her moment of waiting in scanning a pamphlet with her near-sighted eyes. Beside her on the floor lay her yawning bag. She was the picture of benevolence unregulated by any art. In her girlhood, more than one had emphasized brown as her color, and since then she had worn gowns of a dull serge, when she could get it, or if that failed, another material but the same hue. When she was told, as it sometimes happened, that there was no serge of her shade, she felt a vague indignation against a world so ill-regulated as not to fulfil one of the laws of its own being. But however uncertain the quest of the serge, she had it made in the fashion of her mother's earliest years, with a basque buttoned in front, scanty at some points and unrea-

sonably voluminous in others. On this topic of clothes she had also been perhaps too deeply influenced by the portrait of her great-aunt, who had wanted to be a lawyer, and, though she had qualified for the profession, had found herself too early at the gate and had sat through bitter years without a case. At a time when large sleeves were worn, Mrs. Ramsay was highly approving, because, she said, they allowed the muscles play; and after a capricious world veered to a constricted shape, she kept her pattern and gave her arms their will.

Now she tucked the pamphlet into her bag with an accustomed haste, and rose to meet her hostess, to whom she accorded a warm handshake and a delightful smile with a glimpse of perfect teeth. But at Celia she looked searchingly, as at a possible candidate for some sort of honors.

"So this," she said, "is our young lady."

Celia responded with her own charming smile and a little bend of deference and pleasure.

"No, I'm only Celia. Lilian is the one that sings."

They sat down, and Mrs. Ramsay looked from one to the other with the air of collecting earnest information.

"She is here with you?" she pursued. "I should like to see her."

Catherine, who had not much idea whether Bess was at the moment changing her dress to appear or plunging into some of the mad pursuits she affected,—window-washing or the mixing of bread,—rose to find her and engineer her entrance in proper form.

"You are so good to come," said Celia, filling up the first pause.

Mrs. Ramsay ignored that. She was so simply convinced of being everywhere that her duty constrained her to be, that it seemed waste of time to make it a subject of platitude.

"I am very glad you have come here to live," she said, "very glad indeed. This is your father's home."

"Yes, this is papa's home."

"I came to Clyde rather late. I have n't much taste for parochial gossip, but I did gather that this was his home by inheritance. Were you and your sister born abroad?"

"Oh no," said Celia, "we were born in this country. Mamma and I have been travelling abroad lately."

"Your sister was studying there, I presume."

Celia hesitated. Her color grew and gave her for an instant a look of shyness. She answered then, in a quiet commonplace, —

"Not all the time."

"But she has studied abroad?"

Again the little hesitation, like a click before the words.

"Yes," she said.

Then Catherine and Bess came in. The girl had slipped into the plainest of white dresses. She had acquired also her patient look of being led, if not against her will, yet certainly not warmly with it. Mrs. Ramsay bestowed upon her the same benignant handshake, and stood off a little looking at her, with dropped chin, so that the plumpness of the neck augmented itself maturely.

"Whom did you study with?" she inquired. But Celia was moving about the chairs, and somehow the question stayed unanswered.

Mrs. Ramsay was patient when that happened. She really hardly knew it, because life seemed to her such a stress and haste that before an answer was fairly voiced she was flying on to another question. It seemed to her often as if people had already handed in evidence when they were only collecting themselves to break ground.

"You must tell me all about it," she recommended Celia.

"Write it down on a little slip. Write on one side of the paper only. Remember that, dear, won't you? Just tell where she studied and where she has sung and those things that interest people. Pupils!" It came explosively because she thought of it in a flash and it seemed to her the thing. "Should you like some pupils?" she added, and turned to Bess, who was regarding her with a slow gravity, as if she were a peculiar lady to be watched lest she fire at you a question you could n't answer.

"I can't teach," she said. "I don't know enough. I don't know anything about singing myself, not the first thing."

That was surprising, but as Mrs. Ramsay looked at the others and found them unmoved and smiling, she concluded she could not have heard quite clearly. "Let us always," she was accustomed to say, when she had not listened hard enough or facts had afterwards escaped her, "let us always give them the benefit of the doubt." Winterbourne, who had heard her say it in her vaguest moments of being all abroad over the kingdoms of an earth needing reconstruction, said it was the facts themselves to which she meant to accord that benefit.

Mrs. Ramsay had lost herself for an instant in one of those remote excursions that served her for sleep, if one could ever fancy her as sleeping. In these brief flights she seemed to forsake the topic she had been intensely regarding, as one rests the eyes after long-continued work with a lens, and looks temporarily, though no less painstakingly, at something else.

"Your husband," she said to Catherine, "is an old friend of James Trenton Lovell."

"An old friend," Catherine acquiesced. Then an echo of her husband's confidence reached her from somewhere back in her library of facts, though not the memory that it was a

confidence, and she added, "Mr. Lovell inherited something, did n't he?"

Mrs. Ramsay bowed in a forensic manner.

"There was a rumor of it," she said, "but it was n't confirmed. It was in the air. Previous to that time Mr. Lovell left his consulate and retired to the little house where he lives now. His habit of life has not changed. I fancy the report was exaggerated." Having rested the eyes of her mind, she transfixed Celia with the honest orbs of her actual vision. "Did n't I understand you," she inquired, "that your sister had studied abroad?"

Celia was sitting straight in her chair, her lips a little apart as if she were listening keenly to what might be to her benefit or her apprehension. Suddenly, at the question, her face flushed into a vividness of response, extreme interest, defiance even.

"Yes," she said, in the clearest voice, "my sister studied abroad."

Catherine drew a quick breath and went over to replace a fallen log. Bess sat immovable, her hands clasped in her lap as she had been sitting; but her brown eyes, fixed on the green, mistlike trees through the window, slowly filled with tears.

"Were you abroad together?" Mrs. Ramsay continued.

"Yes," said Celia, in the same perfection of interest. "Mamma and I were there over two years. I'm sorry we've no piano here, Mrs. Ramsay. Lilian could sing for you."

Bess got up from her chair and went to the window where she seemed to be looking intently into the street. But she saw only a patch of crocuses by the gate. The plough had escaped them, and they sprang there like gold bubbles blown in the face of the sun. They seemed to her, at the instant, the only friendly thing she had met since she left

her hard routine of work for a rougher road. Mrs. Ramsay was rising, a process of some difficulty because she had to collect the articles she had shed from her during this temporary encampment, and plunge through her bag for a hasty inventory of things which should be there. At last she was drawing on her gray lisle gloves and recapitulating her course of action. She ignored Bess, only because the girl appeared to be withdrawn by some modesty, some inherent aloofness, from their colloquy. When the business aspect of her singing was touched upon, she seemed not even to be in the room: Catherine and Celia had recognized that, in a subtle unconscious way, and were accustomed to talk in her presence as if she were not there at all.

"If you will have her sing for a charity —" Mrs. Ramsay was remarking.

"Oh, anything!" Catherine asseverated.

"I might get her a hearing. I will mention her to the club women I meet. Mrs. Winterbourne, this has been a great pleasure. I regard you as an acquisition to Clyde."

She shook hands again seriously with the two who were vividly crowding upon her with professions of interest in her coming, and forgot the silent figure at the window, facing them now, but out of their circle. Celia went with her to the door, and when she returned, flushed with the fervor of charming, she found Bess quieter than before, if that could be, as still as a bird on its nest when the hunters are looking, and Catherine in a nervous rage of anticipation. There was one topic which Catherine, as she had told her husband, had never broached to her daughter. Why she had not, when she dwelt on it almost to the extinction of her powers, she could not have said. It might have been terror of the ill in the girl which seemed to be coming out now in this incredible falsifying. It might have been the instinct to cover an unlovely thing,

the well-bred attitude of ignoring what is to another's shame. But now at last she knew the moment had come when her self-control, tired by her husband, tired by Lyddy even, who cooked stolidly in her kitchen stronghold and refused to recognize the existence of mistresses, tired by the passivity of Bess who seemed to yield, but only flowed like water into another form, — her armor, before she knew it, was off, and she stood there shaking for all the arrows of unkindliness to wound; knowing from old memory of her scenes with her husband how little appeal, reproach, the storm of temperament avail, she yet hurled her missile at Celia who was entering the room.

"How could you, oh, how could you!"

Bess, with the quietest motion, had walked round the intervening chairs and ranged herself at Celia's side. She stood there looking down at the floor, an image of control, even of meek forbearance, but she seemed not to be taking sides with any one even to the point of hearing. Celia, head up and cheeks glowing, was looking her mother, who had the position of her adversary, straight in the eye.

"What?" she asked. "How could I do what?"

Catherine felt herself daunted by the look. But the word was at her lips, and she uttered it brokenly: "Lie."

A little wave of motion went over Bess, a shudder imperfectly repressed, but Celia did not flinch.

"You're tired, mamma," she said pleasantly, though her voice rang with an unnatural force. "Nobody lies. It's horrid to do that."

Now righteousness and truth were with Catherine, because she saw them insulted and it made her no longer afraid.

"You have n't lied?" she repeated, the hot flash in her eyes, a thrill in her voice. "You did n't tell her your sister studied abroad?"

"Did I?" said Celia, with a coolness which yet seemed not to be insolence at all. "I did n't know I told her so."

They stood confronting each other, Catherine breathless now, terrified by the moral crisis. She turned to Bess.

"Bess," she said, forgetting, in the awfulness of the moment the other name she had given her, "you heard?"

Bess did not lift her eyes.

"You heard," Catherine continued, — "your sister told Mrs. Ramsay you had studied abroad. You heard that."

Now the girl opened her lips, still without looking up. Her voice crept through faintly as if it had scarcely strength to come at all.

"I have n't heard anything."

Catherine stood staring at them, as if she doubted her own ability to understand, even to see and hear.

"Oh," she breathed at last, "I can't bear this. I must see my husband."

As she hurried to the door it was Celia who stopped her with entwining arms, Celia whose cheek was pressed against hers, and who laughed, speaking at a high pitch, with a note that seemed forced and shrill.

"It's a joke, dearest, it's a joke! Don't you see it's a joke?"

Catherine allowed her trembling body to rest for a moment in the compelling arms. When she withdrew herself, she kept on her way to the door.

"I am going to order a carriage," she said, "and drive down to their shooting-box. I must see my husband."

Celia was with her again.

"Let us go with you, dearest," she entreated, in her prettiest manner, — coaxing in it, a child's wayward assumption that it must be indulged. "We want to see what they are doing when they go off to play and pretend it's work. We

want to see this old Mr. Lovell that has the fortune and hid it in a hole."

"It's true, Celia," said Catherine quickly, thrown momentarily off the track, "he had a fortune. Your father said so. Yes, you may go. Only one of you'll have to order a carriage. Lyddy would n't do it if I should ask her."

She hurried upstairs, her eager mind, on this whiff of suggestion, wafted to another scene. But at the stairhead she paused, her hand on the rail. "It was n't a joke," she said aloud to herself, and then went on to her room to powder her tear-stained face and make ready for the drive.

Celia went back into the room where her sister stood in the same place, unmoved. But Bess had raised her eyes, and now she met her sister's in a gaze where some hurt thing seemed to be struggling to keep from expressing itself, and yet imploring voicelessly never to let it be hurt any more.

"I will not —" she said, and her voice failed her and she began over. "I will never do it again. Not even for you. Never! never!"

Celia put quick arms about her, not winningly, as she had encircled Catherine, but fiercely, as if love and shame constrained her, and the two stood so clasped, a moment, trembling.

"What won't you do?" Celia asked, in a whisper, when she had recovered courage for it.

"Lie for you," Bess answered harshly. "Lie for either of us."

Celia recovered herself first, suddenly and with violence, as one throws and masters the plunging animal, emotion.

"I must go and order a carriage." She announced it with a dignified quiet. "Get your hat and come."

IX

THE drive to Headland Point was bordered by marshes where miracles happened so capriciously fast that even the constant eye could never keep comprehensive note of them. There were wildly beautiful curves of marsh islands and lagoons where water ran in, always unexpectedly, even if you knew the tide, painted in a deeper tone of that blue the skyey artists know the secret of. Sometimes little white sailboats went slipping and dipping about these inland channels, playing jokes in navigation, and again one would be left by the tide, and seem, at a distance, to be taking an outing on dry land.

Celia had procured an ancient carryall and a shirt-sleeved boy to drive. Bess had proffered her own services at the reins, but Catherine forbade. It was in Mrs. Winterbourne's mind that if her husband made them welcome she might propose their all spending the night in the trig little place her fancy had conjured up as the shooting-box a man of Hunter's mechanical aptitudes would be sure to have built for himself. To that end she had taken a toilet-bag with her, packed for the girls' necessities also, though they were not yet admitted to her hopes. This was one of the sudden warm days of spring, when summer comes with a leap and sets things to moving madly. The wave of it touched them as they drove, and wakened them in different measures. Catherine drew the sigh that comes after tears, and roused with it to a sense of something peacefully new outside her. What was this world she looked at, this still reality she had almost forgotten in the little intricate game of "getting on"? She had

a delicate sense of beauty, and it had tumultuously responded to old-world marvels in her foreign travelling. She accorded that response as its reasonable due to the romance of place, its poetry collated for her by the consensus of minds. But here under the light of home was the gentle stretch where man had not reared marvels or destroyed them, — plain, kind New England, — and the sight of it roused in her a soothed longing as in the child who runs back to be comforted and finds his mother there. She forgot her troublesome charges, and let her eyes rest on the marsh where the tide was flooding, and only when Bess made a low exclamation did she look at her.

The girl had taken off her hat, and the short ends of her brown hair were curling up in a new life with the moisture and the heat. Her brown cheeks had the tint of red wine, and she was leaning forward, hands in her lap, looking from side to side. "The sea!" she murmured, plainly to herself. "The sea!"

Celia, sitting straight and buoyantly over the rocking of the carryall, did not seem to hear her. The stormy look had not left her face. Her eyes brooded gloomily and yet with a fire of hope in them, on thoughts they determinedly did not disclose. Catherine spoke, —

"No, child, it's not the sea."

Her voice, kind as it always had been, took on a sympathetic warmth, and Bess started at it.

"I thought it was the sea."

"It's the tide, not the full sea. Didn't you ever see the ocean?"

Bess shook her head. There was an eloquent beating in her throat. It seemed to say if idle waterways, messengers of the deep, were such, what could she do when the full swing of waves should smite her?

"We shall have to inquire," said Catherine at length, when their charmed progress had gone on leisurely.

The boy in shirt-sleeves answered with some scorn of detail.

"I know where it is."

"Mr. Hunter's shooting-box?"

"Well, I guess."

They turned here to the north, and took the tongue of land with inland waters on one side and the sea on the other, while the sound of waves came murmurously. Bess leaned out of the carriage more and more, as if to meet the wonder. When they had passed a bluff it was ready for her, the great blue crawling, destructive, girdling snake of the world. Instantly she was out over the wheel, and while she ran the carryall drew up farther on before the old gray shingled structure that was Hunter's refuge when he ran away from town. On the end veranda stood a big figure — as they approached, it seemed colossal — Winterbourne, hands in his pockets, looking out to sea, and at first taking no more notice of them than of any other insignificant detail. But he was aware of them, for he laid his pipe on the window-ledge and came down the step.

"Let her go," he said to his wife, a gesture indicating Bess. There was tenderness in his voice and in his eyes. "She's the natural woman. She'll love the sea and go crazy about it down there by herself."

"Lilian?" asked his wife, stepping out prettily and feeling very glad to see him. "Yes, we'll let her go. Have we surprised you?"

"No," said Winterbourne, with the unmoved patience his voice bore for her. "Come and sit on the piazza. He need n't take the horse out — you'll want to be getting back before dark."

Catherine remembered the bag under the seat and thought she would not mention it. As she looked at the place it became at once evident to her that it was not for exquisite ways, and she was reconciled.

"Celia, go down to her," said Winterbourne. His eyes were soft with a knowledge of what the new daughter was feeling. "Go down to your sister. Take her along the beach. Tell her there's nothing between her and Spain, and she can make the most of it."

Celia set off at a light run, and Winterbourne returned to his wife.

"The other fellows have gone out fishing," he explained. "Mr. Lovell is here?"

Winterbourne stared at her a moment, because he had no idea why she should show the extra kindness of remembering Lovell. But after he had explained again that Lovell was out fishing, he settled himself to entertainment of her, a task for which he felt incompetent, if he was to do it according to her ideals.

Celia met her sister face to face and stopped amazed at the glow of her, the eyes that streamed a flood of pleasure, the crimson cheeks, even the flying tendrils of her hair, crisping every instant. Bess threw back her head and laughed, for no reason except, it seemed, to open her mouth wide and drink into it more of the salt wash of air. Her fervor, the bacchante joy and abandon of her, passed into Celia's veins, and she, too, laughed for nothing. The silence and the waves and the wind had mad hold of them, and all the things they had learned about the desirableness of speaking and walking as others do, passed away from them and left them savage.

"Come," Celia bade her, "walk along the beach."

They took hands and hurried, their faces toward the crinkling water. To Celia, who had crossed it and to whom it was

a necessary adjunct to life on a steamer's deck, it suddenly became the colossal marvel her sister found it. She wanted to break the bonds of her silence, — the silence she had lived in ever since her childhood in her hospitable home, — and call out to it, inarticulate, even uncouth complainings like its own. It would not understand. Nothing understood, but she could at least have a voice and not an inharmonious one, in the natural dissonance of life. Bess was hurrying more and more.

"Stop!" she said, and with the word halted and plumped herself down on the beach in the fashion of children who play in the sand. She untied the ribbons of her correct shoes, pulled off her stockings, rolled them into a neat wad, and stuck them in the shoes. These shoes and stockings she threw with accuracy inland, where they landed in a hollow underneath a tussock. Then she stood up, kilted her short skirt higher, and was free.

Celia looked on for an instant and thought of Catherine. But the little gray house was well behind them, and she, too, fell upon the sand, took off her shoes and stockings and hurled them into the tussock. Upon that, she rose and laid hand upon her sister's wrist, and they ran, their white feet flashing, sometimes on wet sand, with little wild excursions into the water, and sometimes on the drier stretch. The Point runs out into a miracle of water, the harbor still on one side, and farther, toward the setting sun, brown roofs and the spires of town. When the two had come to the narrowing tongue of land, their spirits bade them continue and jump off into the abyss of water, do anything but return. There they stood and looked at each other, hot, with the blood in their cheeks, and then took hands and danced.

Celia danced beautifully. She had been one of a club of unprofessional girls of worshipful high degree who gave

entertainments for the benefit of the poor and the freeing of their own fetters, and she could foot it deftly ; but Bess delivered herself over to an untrained abandon the nymphs would have understood and copied. All outdoors entered into her and made her drunk. Her hair fell about her and she helped it with a hairpin snatched out here and there. Round and round they flew, and there the three fishermen who had sent the boat on to an inner landing, by old Giles, and were walking to stretch their legs, saw them and stood amazed.

Tim, no fisherman, a picture of lank uselessness, shaded by his gray felt hat, understood first, and with a glorious yell was upon them, extending hands that begged to be taken into the ring. Bess looked round and saw him, moderated her transports by a shade, and yet accepted him. It seemed to her and to Celia, under the magic of the moment, the expected thing for natural man to do. With the low sun in their eyes and the west burning, the sea crawling away from them and then advancing, a spell came upon them, and on Lovell next. When he thought of it that night with a burning face, he wondered how it could have been that he seized Hunter by the arm and pulled him forward, that Tim, with one of his uncanny laughs, had broken the ring to let them in, and that they had all danced round three times on the wet sands, and then had stopped and dizzily regarded one another.

Tim, in his high voice, gave an impish hoot, and Dwight Hunter stood straight, like a young savage, refraining from sight of Bess, who, he knew, was twisting up her hair. Lovell stood silently, his breath coming fast, and looked with a serious adoration at the nymphs who had enslaved him by dragging him back with their puissant soft hands to Greece, to Olympus where the unseen are footing it to

soundless measures he only remembered usually in the pages of a book.

But they were walking on together, and Celia, recalled to the customs of life, was talking gayly. Tim answered her, in a swift interchange, and Lovell, on the other side of Celia, looked at the curving line of her ear with the cloudy hair behind it, and felt within him the madness of nature-worship. Once she turned to him, her curved lips parted for a word, and before he knew what he was saying he had stammered out his foolish subterfuge to women,—“Excuse me. I’m a little deaf,” and she had smiled divinely and turned away again.

Bess and Hunter walked behind them with sedate steps, a swinging stride where they accorded, and did not speak. Bess had no perception of him except as one who, like her, had seen the ocean, and was absorbed in its large presence. The world and the sense of it came upon them all when they neared the spot where two pairs of beautiful pumps lay beneath a tussock. Celia cringed a little in her walk. Her back, as Hunter’s eyes dwelt upon it, got demure motions as of a maiden escaping notice. Presently she stopped, and Bess, coming to her side, stood with her.

“Will you go?” Celia asked the men, with much dignity. “We left our shoes here. Please don’t wait for us.”

The three went on without a word, though Tim croaked and sang and tossed his hat into the air, never by any chance catching it, but once setting his foot on it in acrobatic frenzy. Bess and Celia, by the tussock, put on their shoes and stockings gravely and seemed, in the doing, to assume another guise. They sat a moment after their feet were clad, giving little touches to their hair, settling a collar and brushing the sand from skirts. Celia spoke first:—

“She’d be ashamed of us.”

In their brief references to Catherine, when they were alone, she was never known by her name or the scrupulously affectionate title Celia gave her in direct address. It was an unspoken point of honor with them not to discuss her, not to exchange opinions about what she did or required of them to do; but she was always known as "she."

"Why?" Bess inquired, not gainsayingly but as if the question had been bred out of Celia's statement.

"She'd think it was because we are adopted."

They got up then and walked along, not hand in hand but quickly, making a business of going, and when they were nearing the house, Bess said impulsively, as if in defence of Catherine, —

"She never did say it."

"No. She never said it, but she thinks it."

Again they kept on in silence, but when they had come to the little veranda where the sound of voices mingled, Bess turned to her sister, some new assertion in her manner, not pride, not obstinacy, but as if the sea had lent her strength.

"But," she said, "I am not adopted."

Then they mounted the steps, Celia hesitating a pace with a question in her eyes, as if that issue might be carried further, and came upon Catherine holding a court of four deferential men. When she expected public tribute, Winterbourne's patience never failed him. He had put her in the weather-beaten arm-chair, and with a rough tenderness brought her a shawl. She looked young and pretty, in an appealing way, the soft rose of the wind in her cheeks and her eager eyes interrogating the place. Tim was before her, hat in hand, the bright hair all over his forehead, while he grew shriller and more voluble in telling her how they had met two nymphs on the beach and danced with them. Hunter, a

rough hand on his shoulder, was warning him back into a state of repression, and at that moment the nymphs appeared. Catherine, seeing them as they came up the steps sedately, their faces flying the red of rebellion, understood at once.

"Celia!" she said.

Celia came forward to her with a swift, pretty motion of deprecating grace.

"She had n't seen the ocean," she said unaffectedly, "Bess had n't. It set her crazy, set me crazy too—because she was. We danced."

Winterbourne laughed out in robust delight.

"That's the way it ought to be," he cried. "We ought to have the spirit of men and women left in our legs. When we gain a victory over the tariff or the browntail moths or the man that puts up broadsides in the marshes, we ought to take hands and dance in the market-place. God bless you, my dear," he said to Bess, with a real affection and a wicked impulse to plague his wife. "You have brought back to us the manners of an older and a nobler time."

Bess, pursued by the mild reproach in Catherine's eyes, slunk back against the veranda-rail and looked as dull as shyness could make her. Yet there were fugitive gleams in her eyes, straying in quick glances round the corner of the house to the crinkling sea. Hunter had disappeared for a moment, and now he came back, in some diffidence of his own, to say,—

"Mrs. Winterbourne, won't you stay to supper? There's fish. I'm going to fry it."

Bess started forward with her instant impulse toward service, and Catherine made a little prohibitory motion toward her. Perhaps Catherine, having the bare feet in mind, saw the danger in launching her brood upon an unknown sea of camping.

"You are awfully kind," she said, "but I think we must go back. The road was lovely in the afternoon light, but I'd rather not trust myself to our driver after dark. Mr. Lovell, I am so glad to meet you. Your little book is on my table. I have been trying to find the opportunity of telling you how much I like it."

Lovell crimsoned and looked foolish. It was easy to escape his townswomen by fleeing to the seclusion of his chosen failing. Here with these noble dames, when he should have been most a gentleman, he called himself a clown hopped by that clumsy shift. Winterbourne saw him struggling and came nobly in.

"Lovell's deaf as a post," he brutally said, "posts, had-docks, adders—none so deaf as Jim. Let his little book alone. Don't praise him for it. He'd rather be hanged."

But Catherine had risen, and now she advanced to Lovell, and offered him her hand.

"Come to see me," she said graciously. "I'm going to give a little tea, but don't wait for that. Come any afternoon, any evening, if it's easier for you. Mr. Hunter, we'll have our carriage, please."

While Hunter went to summon the boy, who had hitched to a spar he remembered, and now sat, chewing the cud of atrophy, in the carriage, Catherine professed sudden interest in the big bare living-room and bade Tim show it to her. He went with a voluble willingness, measured perhaps by his desire to devote every instant to the silent girls by the rail. Winterbourne sauntered down the steps after Dwight and stood, hands in his pockets, forgetting them all and waiting for the carriage to come up, when his duty of assistant host would end. Celia had flashed three glances at Lovell, standing there, handsome, manly, yet somehow out of the picture,—one when Catherine's gentle onslaught had con-

fused him, one when Winterbourne had defended him to his further shame, and one of her own, full of daring impulse. She put her hand in her sister's and drew her away toward the steps where Winterbourne awaited them — this with a little farewell nod for Lovell, a small, sweet smile. She spoke to Bess, in a quick half whisper, penetrating as a cry: —

“Did you look at him? He looks just like a poet.”

Bess started and gave her hand a warning pressure.

“He does n't hear us,” said Celia, with composure. “Did n't you know they said so? But he looks like a poet. I adore his looks. I could adore him, too.”

Without another look at Lovell, frozen to the spot, straightened into a man challenged by woman's innocent homage, she passed down the steps with Catherine, and in a moment they were in the carryall and driving away. Celia, her cheeks flushed, looking flamingly handsome, sat straight, gazing at the point between the horse's ears until Bess, as if it were impossible to help it, leaned forward and asked her irrepressibly, —

“Did you mean that?”

Celia glanced back with a widening of the eyes and lifted brows, a look of warning that seemed to include Catherine and the silent boy.

“Yes,” she said, in a pronounced fervor. “I meant it.”

“Meant what?” Catherine asked, rousing herself from her muse over her husband as she had just seen him, calm, contented with the bare facts of living, enough air to breathe, a sight of the sea, and the chance to use his hands. He was incomprehensible to her in the simplicity of his needs. In the way of women she wondered, as she had a thousand times, whether she could not change him, and then, since that had been the rock where her barque had split and she saw its black hulk rising again from the waters, whether she could not

change herself. She was ready to be loved again, now in the eager fulness of her prime. If he saw her doing humble tasks like his own, would he love her? "Mean what?" she roused herself to ask again.

Celia answered without apparent premeditation.

"I said I should like to live forever in a place like that."

So it was striking them all, Catherine thought, the wind of longing for a life more free. But Bess, at her sister's answer, leaned back in her seat, and closed her eyes. She looked suddenly dull and pale.

"Tired?" asked Catherine kindly.

"No," she said. "I don't believe I'm tired."

X

THEY drove quietly toward the west and through the lower part of the little town, their magic city as they saw it from the Point. Catherine was still musing, her mind racing back and forward, comparing the present with the past, trying to tint the one with colors matched to those of old, Celia intent upon her map of life as it might be if unknown lands were charted, and Bess shut up again in her patience-breeding cell. So it was until they came to the new club-house built within the year, and here a mob of boys blocked progress, while a woman on the steps addressed them. Catherine awoke out of her muse.

"That," said she, "is Anna Clayton Ramsay. Boy, wait a minute. She's speaking, is n't she? That's very interesting."

Mrs. Ramsay was explaining that a specified reverend gentleman was ill and would consequently be unable to give his lecture on the House-Fly, and the boys, chiefly of the unprosperous and care-free moiety, having accepted that statement with a blighting lack of interest, were now occupied, not with Mrs. Ramsay's announcement for the next week, but in general combat, whackings of backs and cap-pilfering, accompanied by yells of triumph as one or another onslaught came pat. Mrs. Ramsay was at a discount, marked down very low indeed. It was disconcerting. When she addressed the world she was accustomed to see admiring assemblages of her peers, women prepared to respect her subject and give it a deserved applause. Here she was nowhere. She could neither amuse, according to a boy's con-

ception, nor had she authority to admonish. The youthful band for whom the club-house had been built, to the end of entertainment and better morals, learned that there would be "nothing doing" that night, and were expending unconsumed energy on one another. Catherine called to the lady, all unheeded in her kindly zeal,—

"Mrs. Ramsay, here is a seat for you. Drive with us, won't you?"

Mrs. Ramsay managed her difficult exit through the turmoil, and, finding the step, lifted a substantial foot to it. Bess, in a flash, was out on the other side, after her little apologetic petition to Catherine:—

"I'd like to walk. Please let me. Celia, you come, too."

With a charming word to Mrs. Ramsay, Celia followed her. The carryall went slowly on, and Bess stood watching its back until, out of the small crowd, the boy whipped up and it bobbed away at a brisker pace. Then she turned, seemed to put her head down and cut the throng, pulling Celia after her, until she found herself at the foot of the steps. There she paused an instant for a breath, ran up the steps and stood at the highest vantage. Celia, dazed, was still beside her. Bess opened her lips and gave a cry, a beautiful singing cry, as Brunhild might have called in her playground of the air. The boys stopped singing; they were listening. She gave another. They turned to her. Now while they faced her, she had her audience.

"Boys," she said, "I'm going to sing to you."

"Bully for you!" answered a ringleader.

There were two or three dissenting groans. Some of them had not been clever enough to read the promise in the opening cry.

"Can we get into the hall?" asked Bess.

No. There were groans of "no." Ma'am Ramsay had car-

ried off the key, they volunteered. It was evidently an unpopular proceeding.

"I'll sing here," said Bess.

She sang the "Irish Washerwoman" and took up her skirts and danced to it. The boys also danced. They begged with catcalls and yells and almost with tears for "Money Musk" and "Fisher's Hornpipe," but she denied them and led them into the twilight land of ballads. They went to war with the Minstrel Boy and understood perfectly all about it. Celia, too, fell heir to the wild charm of it, and found she had an ache in her throat and smarting eyes. Bess sang the "Wearing of the Green" then, and young Erin joined her, and, in some danger of drowning her out, was set upon by the majority and choked into abnegation. Celia stood in the background and wondered. She was conscious that here was power, a triumph of a sort, and her own blood responded, yet with a bitterness of revolt that this was not a victory to be scored. There was an hour of this perhaps, and then the singer ceased.

"That's all, boys," said Bess. "Good-night."

It was not all, they assured her in their own language. They could not have it so. No more flattering meed ever came from a house that refuses to go home, and stamps its greedy wonder. She sang them another and yet another.

"Boys," she said then, "I've got to go. I have n't had my supper. I'm as hungry as a shark."

That they acquiesced in.

"Will yer come again?" a shrill voice asked her.

Yes, she would come again. Then they cheered her, and through the lane they made, she and Celia took their way to the narrow sidewalk, and began a sharp clip for home. But not alone. Behind them was their adoring horde, tramping in booted feet, pattering on bare soles, but silent now,

a guard of honor. Once a rabble, it was an army. It followed to Winterbourne's gate. Celia, her hand on the door, waited. Bess turned to her following.

"Good-night, boys," she said. "Thank you. Good-night."

"Same to you," returned the spokesman. But they waited. She knew what they wanted, and she sang "Annie Laurie." One boy of an admirable voice, used to the star part in the "Echo Song" at school, joined her, but a critic fell upon him and he ended, gurgling.

"Good-night," said Bess, and followed Celia in.

Catherine, crossing the hall, met them. "Didn't I hear singing?" she asked.

"No, dear," Celia answered. "Or it was some one going by. Did your drive tire you?"

That night Bess went to her room early and with a swift directness made ready for bed. She was not likely to do much of the vague wandering that makes a woman's chamber a bower for musing, a halting-place for sitting, chin in hand, to ponder over the marvels of the garden called youth that opens without a break into the glade of love — perhaps heart-break, perhaps death. This girl's muscles were too tired to allow her blissful torpors. She would have sunk through them into sleep. Her life had trained her to run from one task to another and to keep her mind in an obedient concentration on what might be required of her. When she went about her chamber, it was indeed with a serious face, as if she had grave topics to consider, as if, in the way of those who live much alone, her best confidant was herself. But always her steps were for a purpose, not the unconsidered flights of the woman who begins to braid her hair and remembers something more interesting; who stops to read a letter or look out a quotation from a book. Bess was a soldier always in marching

order, and when she had put her head down on her pillow, it was to close her eyes at once and brush off the cobwebs woven by the day.

Before she was asleep there was a hand at her door, and Celia in her nightgown came softly in. Bess sat up instantly and asked if anything was the matter, but Celia, without answering, slipped into bed beside her and hugged her tight. Bess accepted her timidly. She was a warm, sweet creature who did not yet know how to express the shy inundations of her own nature. Celia clung to her, trembling, and seemed to cry a little.

"What is it?" Bess asked her, greatly troubled. "What is it, sister?"

At last Celia told her.

"You are not happy," she said. "We've taken you away from what you like, and you don't like this."

Bess stiffened beside her.

"No," she answered coldly, "you have n't taken me away from what I liked. There was nothing I liked particularly."

The chilling of her tone was distressing to Celia. It hurt her vanity, and something deeper still — that strong devotion binding her to her sister as the one thing she had of her own. She was really crying now, shaking not more with the intensity of her sobs than from the misery of seeing the heaven of her expectations darken day by day.

"You don't care about me, either," she said. "I don't believe you care at all."

Bess gave her a little involuntary shake, and then caught the slight form to her in compunction.

"Of course I care about you," she said indignantly. "Are n't we sisters? I guess I should care about my own sister, should n't I?"

But Celia, lying trembling in her arms, felt a distress she

could not even understand. It seemed to go back to the fact that her sister did not really speak her language. She felt with humility that Bess was her superior, in beauty, in her rich gift, and, as the suffrages of the world seemed to denote, in charm. But these subtilities of the inner life were closed to her. There was a language Bess did not merely refrain from using: she had not learned its elements. Celia made another trial.

"You don't seem to care about anything, Lilian."

Her sister's breast lifted in one long sigh.

"Don't call me that when we are alone," she said. "Call me Bess."

"Don't you like to be called Lilian?"

"It's not my name. My name is Lizzie Hartwell. I'd like well enough to be called Elizabeth. That was mother's name. Or I'd like to be called Bess."

Celia whispered jealously into her ear, as if she were afraid even the world of night might overhear it,—

"How do you know mother's name was Elizabeth?"

"I went to the Poor Farm at Barnardsville and found out."

"Why did you go there?"

"Because the Callahans, that brought me up, told me I came from the Poor Farm in Barnardsville. They took me because I was a good strong child, and they had n't any of their own."

Celia shuddered.

"You cold?" asked Bess kindly, and drew a blanket over her.

"I never heard of the Callahans," Celia pursued, as if in hatred of it all.

"No. They both died when I was fourteen. He'd made a little money teaming and bought him a house; but he

took to drink and went downhill, and when he died there was nothing left. And then his wife died, and I went to work at the tavern."

"Were they —" Celia found herself forced to this question, but she was afraid of it. "Were they good to you?"

"Oh, yes," said Bess simply. "Real good."

"Did you —" Here again she hesitated. It seemed impossible to accept a bond between her sister and a teamster who had taken to drink. "Were you fond of them?"

Bess considered.

"I don't know as I was," she owned. "You can't tell about children. They're like little pigs or kittens. They'll go where the trough is, or where they find the warmest lap. I don't believe they have much heart for old folks until they've had a few hard knocks themselves and find out what it is to —"

She stopped there, apparently because no words offered themselves to clothe her strong sense of the gigantic thing life does to us when it moulds us into shape to move about among the other organisms it has bred.

Celia had more questions to ask, but she shrank from them and put her fear into words.

"I wish I knew what you found out about — mother; but I'm almost afraid to ask."

Bess replied at once with no reproof of her, but a direct and simple wonder.

"What makes you afraid of finding out anything about your own mother?"

Celia was conscious of a warm flood of affection toward her sister, and of an angry partisanship for the unknown others of her own blood, but she was also aware of an almost proven certainty that Bess was not what could be called a lady, and that, almost as indubitably, her mother also was not.

"What was mother?" she whispered.

"Why, she was just father's wife," said Bess, in a clear tone that seemed to Celia to be too loud in the still chamber. "Father was a carpenter."

"Oh!" It was a quick little cry, as if Celia had been struck, or felt the sudden indignant pain of looking on at the hurt of another. "Do you suppose," she whispered, in a fierce revulsion, "she knows that?"

"Who?"

"Mamma."

There was a pause before the word, as if she used it unwillingly, or felt the disloyalty of borrowing it at all while they were dwelling on the ties of blood. But to Bess all these things were simpler.

"I don't know," she said. "Maybe. You'd been put into a minister's family, you know. The Callahans had taken me."

"And you went to find out about it all," said Celia, in wonder and with a pang suffered at her own defection. "I never once thought of going."

"It was n't to find out," said Bess. "I wanted to see mother's grave and make sure 't was taken care of."

"And was it?"

"Not very well. There was an old man that cut the grass for his horse, but the stones were tipping. I had 'em fixed, and set out a Province rose."

Even then Celia felt a little pang because her sister used the colloquial pronunciation, and was probably ignorant that France had a Provence as rich as its own roses. Bess seemed to have been born yesterday, so far as the inherited common-places went.

"Father and she were there together," Bess continued dreamily. "It was a nice spot. The clematis came over the wall."

"Did you find out anything about them?"

"Yes. The old man's wife — the one that cut the grass — showed me where they lived. 'T was a nice little house with a piazza and jessamine by the door. She had a picture of father — a tintype. He was a tall man with a big nose and kind of serious eyes. I'll show it to you to-morrow."

"Was n't there any of — her?"

"No. The old lady said she would n't have any taken. Her health had begun to fail, — they were poor, you see, and she'd worked hard, — and she was pretty peaked."

Celia could see that the old woman's testimony had made deep impression on her.

"Mother's hair was 'black as a crow.' I thought of that the minute I saw you, the day you stooped down over me when I was washing the floor, and showed me your little ring like mine. I thought I guessed you looked like mother and maybe I was more like father."

"But what made you think of it first?" Celia insisted, "going to find out about them?"

"Why, I'd wanted to ever since I was a little girl."

"But you did n't try to find me!"

"I was going to," Bess told her seriously, "but I had to find them first. I could n't do either till I'd saved up."

"How long did it take you to save?"

"A good many years — seven, I guess. I never've earned much."

They were silent then, Celia thinking and Bess growing sleepy. Celia felt not condemned as yet, but challenged to be told why she had not been saving for years to substantiate her claim to her father and mother. But there was an undercurrent of changeless purpose in her, and her sister's last sentence rang in her ears as the text for an argument she might use.

"You have n't earned much," she repeated. "Think what you could earn if you 'd only try. There's your voice. Voices are gold mines."

"My voice," repeated Bess wonderingly.

She was used to thinking very simply of herself, with no degree of pride, and her voice was a part of herself, a power that gave pleasure, she knew, but not of any value adequate to the estimate these two women placed on it. Catherine and Celia amazed her. She was bemused at them. They appeared to her to be playing an intricate game of which she did not know the terms, and she was at peace only when she could escape from her brooding over it and lose herself in the actual work for which, it seemed to her, the earth was made. There were so many things to be put in order on it, as she saw it, so many people to be fed and made clean and have decent beds spread for them. The old-fashioned woman was not going out while girls like Bess, half-mother, half-handmaiden, were born into the world. Celia was asking her impatiently, —

"Don't you want to sing?"

"Yes," said Bess, "I like to sing well enough — I like it ever so much — when I feel like it."

Celia was jealously afraid that it was only low people who made her feel like it, because she had certainly done it with glorious abandon to the gamins in the street. But Bess should be forced to say.

"Don't you feel like it when nice people are listening to you?" she asked, with some degree of coldness, "people like mamma, like Mrs. Ramsay — or papa?"

"Oh, I could sing for him any time he asked me," said Bess warmly. "Any time, all the time, if he wanted I should."

"Now, why? What makes the difference?"

"He would let me —" an eloquent note had come into her voice, — "he would let me sing in my gingham dress. I can't do anything when I'm made into a kind of a monkey."

"Do you mean you don't like nice clothes?"

"I do like them," the woman in her cried out eagerly.

Celia was encouraged greatly. Nothing but genuine passion, the due of clothes, could have bred that warm note, she knew, in her sister's voice. Bess was continuing.

"But if I've got to wear tight slippers and pretend I've always done it, if I've got to keep from speaking about the Callahans or the tavern — why, it's as much as my life is worth to remember not to speak — and if I've got to pretend I studied abroad, and hear you — Oh!"

Her voice died weakly in the thought of the shame and tediousness of it all.

"Hear me what?" asked Celia.

But Bess would not continue, and Celia beat upon her silence with rougher and yet heartbroken entreaties. At length she said it herself.

"Well, I know what it is," she announced sullenly. "You think I say what is n't so."

But Bess would not even strengthen the situation by accepting it.

"I do it for you," said Celia passionately. "I never did it in the world till I tried to make a way for you."

"But I don't want a way made for me," Bess assured her now, in tears of a vexed harassment.

"Then you should want it. Don't you want to prove to her that there's something in us as good as if we were n't waifs and strays?"

"Why, I should n't care about that," said Bess, in a wonder.

"I care, then. I care dreadfully. I've been a disappointment to her. She's wanted me to study everything she could think of that would bring me before the world and do her credit. And I can only go just so far and then stop. I can't be a credit to her and she knows it. She's awfully disappointed."

"What does she want you to be a credit for?" Bess inquired, groping.

"Why, because everybody has to have something to be proud of. It may be money, or genius, or social position. And she's got nothing. Her husband can't make money for her —"

"He could if he wanted to," Bess averred jealously. "He's too good."

"Well, he has n't made it. And he won't entertain with her. He won't even live with her —"

"He's living with her now."

"See how he'll scud out of the house the minute she begins to bring people into it. No. She's a disappointed woman. And she's disappointed in me, and I can't bear it, and if she's going to be disappointed in you, too, I shall wish we were both dead."

"Don't wish that," said Bess, out of a dull experience. "It does no good."

This was the closest talk they had ever had about their personal relations. Celia had been too afraid of finding out what would be better unknown, to probe far into her sister's mind. She had, in an involuntary cowardice, determined to accept her as she was and invite her at once into her own house of life. But when it proved that Bess had to be dragged there, and that she stayed only from minute to minute because duty bade her and not as if she had any settled purpose of remaining, then they had to come to close quar-

ters, to understand each other better. There had got to be a common language between them, and this Celia was trying to establish. Bess, in her habit of silence, would never have asked a question till the day of doom. She accepted life, she accepted people and what they did to her. If they were exacting, she stood up and took ill-usage. If they were adorably kind — she had never contemplated that possibility. Sometimes they asked too much of her in a way she had to resent, and offered her hideous homage she had dealt with like a savage, but her one stint was to endure. Besides, Celia was dinning into her ears in a further pursuance of her persuasion : —

“She has lost money, quantities of it.”

“Did she tell you?”

“No, but a friend of hers did. They speculated together, and one day Mrs. Greenough came to the house when she was out and told me they’d lost nearly everything, and cried in my arms.”

“Did you like her?” Bess asked curiously.

“No.”

“But she cried in your arms.”

“Oh, yes,” said Celia carelessly. “She was awfully upset.”

Bess had been guilty of her inevitable moment of wonder whether Celia’s ready embrace, her phraseology of endearment, were more than a valueless coinage, though stamped with the current die. But this she could not let herself pursue because it was too puzzling for her, and also it brought her shame. A shadowy verdict in the back of her mind told her that Celia, too, should be ashamed. Now she broached what seemed to her the only feasible plan bred out of this confusion of lost money and conflicting aims.

“Why don’t we go away together, you and I? We could

support ourselves. Then they need n't maintain us. That would be something off their hands."

"Go away!" Celia contemplated it for only an instant of incredulity. "Give it all up! Give up her? You're crazy."

"You're too fond of her to give her up," Bess suggested humbly. "Well, I'm glad of that. You ought to be, and grateful, too."

Celia did not commit herself upon that point, and Bess asked, in a moment, with timidity, —

"Celia, when you said that before that man — Mr. Lovell — about liking him, you know —" She could not utter the actual word, adore, but Celia understood and gave a little concurring sound, — "did you mean it?"

But at that Celia laughed and would not answer.

"I thought for a minute," Bess averred, in a tone that indicated she was ready to be derided if she were really as foolish as she hoped, "I almost thought — now you can be as mad as you want to with me — for a minute I almost thought you meant he should hear you, and you'd thought how she said he had money and — Oh, you know you've tried to get money from so many people and it's always for me." Her voice died miserably, in the shame of it.

Celia touched her cheek with a little cool, kind kiss and would not tell. But presently she said curiously, —

"Bess, did any man ever kiss you?"

Bess came upright in bed, escaping her sister's arms. She sat there breathing resentment of a sort that seemed to be power in itself.

"Don't talk to me about them," she said, with a hot spasm in her voice. "I hate them."

"Men?"

"Yes."

"What for? What should you hate them for? Come back and tell me."

Bess sat there in her lovely state, her brows knotted over angry eyes. This she felt, and hated the tension of it and was glad nobody could see her in the dark. She was savage at the thought of emotion, and turned her back on it. Only the cool, clear ways of being suited her.

"They used to try to talk to me at the tavern," she said. "They were mostly a common lot. Some of them — the worst of them — tried to —"

Her voice failed her, and Celia, in an equal throb of anger, sat up in bed beside her.

"To kiss you?" she whispered, as if the word hurt her.

"Yes." In her sister's voice there was nothing but shame.

"And they did n't! they did n't!" Celia cried.

"No!"

"What did you do?"

"Went away. Hid. Looked them in the face. One man I knocked down."

"You did, Bess? You did that? How could you?"

"I could n't if he'd expected it. I was ashamed of it. I never saw him again."

"Did you think you had killed him?"

"No."

"Were you frightened?"

"No. I hated him."

Then they went back to their pillows, and shuddered out their horror of it each alone.

"That's why —" Bess yielded to a choking sob — "that's why I don't want you to lead them on. That was leading him on this afternoon. It's dreadful."

"But he's not like that," Celia wondered.

"No. But you don't know what it is. You're pretty, dar-

ling." The tender word had never escaped her before, and Celia, who was beginning to know her, saw how deep an emotion must have given it birth. "They could n't help liking you. But they've thought I was the dirt under their feet. So you be careful."

They clasped hands then and dropped away to sleep. But in the middle of the night, Celia came half-awake and turned to her sister.

"But you were n't," she cried wildly, out of her dream, "you were n't the dirt under their feet."

"No, dear, no," said Bess, and drew the blanket over her.

XI

THE next morning Winterbourne came home, entering the kitchen door and finding Lyddy seated at the corner of the bare cooking-table, taking her early cup of tea. This, he realized, with a sensation of immediate peace, was as he liked the house, asleep, with a silent servitor ready to let him share her own simple satisfactions. The forms of social life, the necessity of doing this or that according to an established code lest you break faith with the other movers in the game, seemed to him like finding litter in what should be an uninterrupted path—the road to true pleasure and the arts. Lyddy, who no doubt enshrined him in her heart as the fount of all her blessings, had no obtrusive respect to offer him, and that he liked. She looked up, and nodded at him, and inquired with only a moderate show of interest,—
“Got home?”

“Yes,” said Winterbourne. “Any more tea?”

Lyddy rose, for sufficient answer, poured him a cup, and gave it to him on the broadside of the bare table. She went into the dining-room and returned with the great dish of fruit ready for the family breakfast and set it before him beside the bread and butter that had made her own repast. Winterbourne was greedy of fruit. He sat and ate oranges with a generous gusto, and then attacked his bread and tea in the delight of the healthy man’s appetite for simple things. Lyddy began mixing a corn-cake for breakfast, and Winterbourne sometimes watched her lame trot about the kitchen and sometimes stared out of the window with an equally absent gaze. If home could be like this, he was glad to be here. Lyddy

slid her cake into the oven and clanged the door on it. Then she stood by the stove, evidently calculating on her next move in the day's circuit. But suddenly her mood seemed to be sharply invaded. She turned on him a quick glance from her piercing eyes.

"How long they goin' to stay?" she inquired.

Winterbourne started, brought back to social ties.

"Who?" he asked perversely.

"Your folks."

"My wife will stay as long as it suits her," he returned with dignity, which instantly broke down under the certainty that Lyddy knew him better than any human person, except, perhaps, that sane, sweet child who was Celia's sister. She seemed to show capacities of understanding all the normal desires and aversions of healthy life. "Oh, I don't know," he added irritably. "Why under the heavens can't you like folks, Lyddy? What's the sense of your being so cross-grained and no good generally?"

Lyddy took no notice.

"You don't like folks yourself," she remarked, with an unmoved front.

"I don't? Who is it I don't like, you old catamount?"

Lyddy's mouth widened in the knowing grin that answered her for rare acknowledgment of the humors of the world.

"Me, I guess," she vouchsafed calmly, and went into the woodshed about some more remote task.

Winterbourne shook his head at her back, and then even shook his fist, and went off through the dining-room to the sitting-room, where he thought he could light a fire and steal half an hour's reading before the women were down. But as he went, he debated uneasily in a strain he hardly dared accept as the thoughts he was willing to think. Did he fail to like people? he wondered. Did he fail to like his wife?

The dining-room, as he walked through it, looked different to him. There was a subtle air of exquisite order and a cleanliness so fine, where everything had been clean before, that he almost felt the fragrance of it in his nostrils. There were muslin curtains at the windows. These he did not note as curtains. Only he saw there was a veiled and shimmering effect where once there had been squares of light from windows not always clear. The whole thing seemed veiled in an artful way, — petticoated. He grumbled a little, inarticulately. It was exquisite, yet it meant women. But in the sitting-room, in his own den, there was another sort of difference, — cleanliness here, but not ornamented and befringed. There were no draperies at the windows. Yet the house-genius had been here, also, only to another end. The litter of dust and chips that had used to mark his trail when he brought in wood was replaced by a speckless floor. The andirons shone. The windows sparkled at him. The fire burned brightly, and, most tranquillizing sight, his light-stand was drawn before the fire and his book was on it. There, too, was his chair, and he smiled confidentially to himself in thinking that, if his pipe and pouch were not at that moment in his pocket, they would seem to be welcome on the bare, clean mantel, destitute of hatefully obstructing vase or statuette.

He sank into his chair and stretched his legs to the blaze, looking somnolently into it, not because he was sleepy thus early after daybreak, but because fire always charmed him. He heard steps in the dining-room, and looked across the hall at Bess moving about in a quiet, absorbed way, setting the table. She had on a white dress with a blue figure in it, made in what he thought a very modest fashion to fit her work, with a round waist and only a few ruffles. That it was old-fashioned he did not know, — really her best dress saved from the tavern days and brought with her into these am-

bitious paths because, although she might not, two weeks ago, have expected to wear it ever, it had cost her too much pains, too many stolen minutes of sewing after ten at night, to be relinquished lightly. While he watched her with the half-smile of absorbed attention, she set a large clear glass of jonquils on the table, and when she found she had put them in a shaft of sunlight, seemed to stop, absorbed, and regard them with a musing wonder. Winterbourne understood. She was worshipping them, he thought, and while she worshipped, the spring outside the window and the spring of life quickened in her. But she took herself away. There were other tasks. One was to find the morning paper on the hall floor and bring it in to him, with her careful air of wishing to fulfil all needs as soon as possible.

"You need n't give me that," said Winterbourne. "I don't want your morning paper."

She smoothed it into a compacter fold, and laid it on the side table.

"Don't you, sir?" she asked; and then, evidently as a service not to be resisted, took a handful of cones out of the basket and dropped them on the fire.

Winterbourne laughed out. Her painstaking satisfaction in all the little beauty-breeding devices of the house gave her a touching interest.

"Daughter of earth!" he said.

"What, sir?" asked Bess.

He laughed again, and put out his hand to her as if in a deferred greeting, and she laid hers in it. She looked at him, frankly smiling. He was entirely worthy to be the master of the house, her instinct told her, whom it would be her pride to serve.

"Bess," said Winterbourne, "you sang something in Italian, the other day — *Che faro* —"

He seemed to be prompting her, and she nodded, her eyes still on his, like a creature that has been caught and needs to know what is expected of it.

"Sing it to me," he commanded.

She opened her lips obediently, and the room echoed to lovely melody. Winterbourne fancied the old walls thrilled in pleasure, though he smiled at her painstaking eagerness in the task, and understood perfectly that she was so pleased to see him that the music was quite a fountain of joy. Her white teeth, the beautiful red of her open mouth, commended themselves to him, and he thought her exquisitely endowed, if only, for purposes of song, she proved to have sufficient brains.

"What did it mean, Bess?" he asked her gently, still keeping her hand.

Her face, eager for his approval, warmed by a quick, bright flush. He was afraid the seeking eyes were about to have tears in them.

"I forgot," she faltered. "I do know what it means, but I forgot."

"You thought it was just a song," he encouraged her. "You wanted to please me with it. You did n't remember it was written by somebody in trouble."

"Was he in trouble?" she asked eagerly.

"He?"

"The composer?"

Winterbourne wondered when he should find the depth of her ingenuousness.

"Not the composer," he answered, with that same quietude which seemed calculated to leave her, like a bird, sitting on the eggs of her wonder. "The lover. It is sung by Orpheus, you know. He loved Eurydice so much that he went down into hell to find her."

Bess was looking at him in a clear, bright questioning. She seemed to challenge the gravity of his meaning.

"He could n't really," she rejoined. "What makes you say he did?"

"It is an old story," Winterbourne continued cautiously, proving his way by study of her face. "We can say anything, if the story's old enough."

"He could n't go down into hell," Bess rejoined, with entire conviction. "Nobody but Christ could do that."

This brought Winterbourne to earth he found debatable.

"The old stories mean a good deal," he said. "They mean something that is always true. Don't you think, if you loved a person very much, you could bear to go down into hell to find him?"

"Yes," she answered promptly, "I could, — Celia, or you."

This was unexpected, and he dropped her hand. But she was evidently considering the means of locomotion thither with the quiet absorption in things as they are.

"But there would n't be any way," she said conclusively. "There is n't any road down into hell. Hell is n't a place."

This seemed hopeful, and he asked, "What is it?" But she shook her head.

He changed his ground. "Do you know Italian?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she nodded brightly, as if she had now the means to please him. "I know this song. I learned it when I was sitting in the hall, waiting for my lesson. He was teaching it to somebody else. And I know *Batti, batti*, and I know three others."

"But this song: Orpheus sings it. What does it mean? What did he mean by singing it?"

By that he seemed to have found the numb spot in her

brain, and she looked at him with no manner of response. She even seemed distressed, as if knowing she was about to disappoint him. That Winterbourne saw, and forestalled it quickly.

"Never mind," he said. "After breakfast you come in here to me, and we'll talk Italian. I'm going to tell you what you'd say if you and I were living in Italy and I wanted to ask you what those yellow flowers are out there on the table —"

"Daffys!" she breathed involuntarily.

"And what there was for breakfast, and what makes Lyddy fasten us out of the kitchen —"

"Why, it's her kitchen," said Bess, "I know that."

Winterbourne gave a hoot of laughter, and wondered whether, though she looked so sweetly appointed for life, she might really be an idiot child after all; and at that moment there was the swift rustle of silk on the stairs, and his wife came in, attaching her lorgnon to her chain. Celia followed her. They were both, in the most flattering manner, responsive at the sight of him.

"John!" exclaimed his wife, and "Papa!" Celia vouchsafed, coming in but one beat after. They ranged themselves in front of him, and regarded him with a welcome that seemed overdrawn. He pulled his brows together and scowled at them.

"What's this?" he asked. He put out a forefinger, and touched Catherine's sleeve.

"This?" She looked down at it through her lorgnon. "What does it seem to be, John? Celia, what is it?"

He had removed the mandatory forefinger. Now it was indicating Celia's person.

"I want you to tell me what this is?" he demanded. "The cloth, the goods."

"Mercy, papa, they're *lingerie* waists," said Celia. "I don't know what the cloth is. It's cotton. Do you want to know what our skirts are? Mine's serge and mamma's is *étamine*."

Winterbourne spoke to himself, as if in wonder.

"They look like soft stuff. They don't look as if they'd make a noise, and yet wherever you go about the house, it's rustle, rustle, like blades of corn against each other in the wind."

"That's petticoats," said Celia. "Silk petticoats. Everybody has silk petticoats."

"No, they don't," said Winterbourne. "She does n't have 'em." He pointed a tragic arm at Bess who had brushed up the hearth and was prepared to leave the room when this invocation brought her back, half-startled, into public notice. "She does n't go round the house with screaming petticoats. She walks softly, like a decent girl. My father Jupiter! Pleiades and Orion and the sun and moon!" His rage came upon him. His beard seemed to bristle and his hair to rise. "Are women to go crackling round this earth breaking into the music of the spheres, drowning the voice of the morning stars as they sing together, with the swish, swish of petticoats made by damned silkworms?"

"O John!" trembled his wife.

She had risen so sweetly, and her day seemed to be darkened before her by a sombre curtain. But somebody gave a little giggle. It was Bess, there on the threshold looking back at them. For an instant Celia was aghast, but she saw the mirth run into Winterbourne's eyes, and augmented it with a little shout and crow of pleasure. It seemed to her that, by no effort, she had the key to him, or rather that Bess, without knowing it, held the key and had lent it to her for one brief sufficient minute. For the first time in his life,

perhaps, Winterbourne saw the key was delivered up. He snatched a block of wood from the hearth and threatened them.

"Out of my way!" he commanded. "Out of this room! Go! efface yourselves, eat your breakfasts, get some nourishment into your brains, and then you, Bess, come back to me and take your lesson."

They went, the two girls gayly, and his wife in a smiling compliance with what seemed to be the new order of the day. But as Bess brought in the breakfast and Mrs. Winterbourne painstakingly read over an editorial she was sure Anna Clayton Ramsay had assimilated perfectly, if she had not even written it, her delicate hand, holding the lorgnon, trembled a little, and she took a timid glance or two over it at her husband, peacefully reading in the other room. When the coffee was before her, she looked at Bess and nodded toward him.

"Call your father, Bess," she said half-suggestingly. "Or you might touch the bell."

"He's had his breakfast," said Bess. "He had it in the kitchen half an hour ago."

It was a remark she was not unwilling to make, Catherine saw with pain. It looked like another proof of the girl's social density. How should it not be disturbing for one member of the family to prefer to take his breakfast in the kitchen?

Bess ate in some haste and then sat with her hands tightly folded under the cloth, glancing from one to the other as if she were in readiness for the meal to end. When Catherine did rise, and Celia, having selected a jonquil to draw through her belt, with her, Bess flew about her tasks with hurrying feet. She always cleared the table and carried the dishes into the kitchen, to leave Lyddy in a carefully

woven illusion that her work lay there and in no other part of the house. Celia helped, in a pretty, desultory way, and when they had done, Bess vanished to present herself before Winterbourne who had now partly forgotten and was deep in poetry. For two or three minutes she stood silently before him, and then he did look up at her.

"What?" He frowned. "What is it? You're the girl that laughed at me awhile ago. What do you want now?"

She did not seem able to speak, but fastened on him with reminding eyes.

"I know," said Winterbourne. He laid down his book. "To be sure I know. We're going to talk Italian. Sit you down in that little chair, and answer what I bid you."

Now Celia and Catherine had arrived, Catherine with her lorgnon unnecessarily to her eyes, and curiosity coming out all over her, like steam.

"Are you going to teach that child Italian?" she asked. "That's perfectly splendid of you. But you can't stop there. We'll have a class."

Winterbourne laid his glasses on his book and looked at her. He did not storm. In the back of his mind there was a ticklish suspicion that somebody might laugh, because the unknown had happened and he had been laughed at once.

"No," said he, "no, Catherine. It's not going to be a class. You and Celia run about your business. Bess and I are going to talk Italian and we're going to talk alone."

"But really, dear," said his wife, with an animated play of the lorgnon, "it would be of the greatest possible use to us if you'd let us come in. Celia speaks quite fluently, as it is. She was of the greatest service in Florence when all I could think of was *acqua calda*, and every time I said it, it seemed as if I were asking for cold water instead of hot. It *is* hot, is n't it — *calda*? Yes, I know how I had to remember that

difference all the time. But don't you think, if you really want Bess to learn, she will acquire confidence a great deal faster if there are more of us —"

Winterbourne rose from his chair and stood ceremoniously, looking at his wife. She faltered; the words froze on her lips. Celia was standing in the doorway, enchanted that her sister had found a partisan. She kissed her hand to them impartially.

"Come, mamma," said she. "Come help me address the envelopes for the circular."

"Well, if you really don't want us," said Catherine, "if you really think —"

Here she retreated, and Winterbourne resumed his seat.

"Take your chair, child," he said, with an immediate gentleness for his chosen pupil. "Yes, that stool's well enough. Now, here we are!"

Bess was not there entirely. She was looking at the doorway where Catherine had disappeared. Distress of a mild nature was on her smooth forehead.

"Don't you think, sir," she hesitated, "don't you think you might have let them stay?"

"What? Stay? Oh," said Winterbourne, quite unconcerned about them now they were gone. "No, they don't want to stay. They only want to dance round the pot and stir it if they think there's something doing. You and I have got to kill the kid and skin it and pick the herbs and watch the pot all day. Then when it comes supper-time, they can skulk round and taste the brew, if they like. Not now. Now we're going to talk about Italy."

She sat like a still little animal, her eyes almost unwinkingly on his face. She was afraid, he saw, of letting wisdom slip, and it tickled him because nothing was so important as all this came to.

"What can you tell me about Italy?" he asked, purposely in the manner of the instructor.

She accepted the cue and responded instantly, —

"Italy is situated in the southern part of the continent of Europe. Rome is the capital of Italy. The principal productions are —"

It was, he thought, his own old geography, probably studied in some country region where one generation inherited the textbook of another, and the traditions of teaching had been unchanged for fifty years. But he stopped her.

"That's very well," said he, "very well indeed. Now I want to tell you how I went there." He began as if it were a fairy story, and Bess sat with that unchanging gaze upon his face. "When I was little more than a boy," said Winterbourne, "perhaps three years older than you are now, I took passage on a small fruit steamer and shipped for Italy. We had a long voyage, and all the way I was reading from a case of books I took with me. I had a beautiful time. We landed at Naples and I went straight to Rome."

"The capital!"

"Yes, the capital. I'm not going to tell you what I saw there, nor what I saw in Florence, nor the little hill towns that are as beautiful," — he paused for a simile and selected one to fit her, — "as pretty as the picture on a card."

Bess nodded.

"It was very warm, the sky was blue, the sea was blue, there were flowers, and men and women in queer and pretty clothes. But what I want really to tell you about Italy is this."

He leaned forward and looked into her eyes with his great brown ones, bright with their enchanter's gleam. What he had to say to her, she saw, was of immense importance to him, and she made up her mind it must be

valuable to her also. As he seemed to be probing her intelligence by that piercing eye-gleam, so she was calling on her mind to meet it. Winterbourne felt sure that at least she would memorize what he told her.

"Italy," he said, "is a very old country. So is Greece. So is all Europe old. But now we're talking about Italy and we won't speak of any of the others, except Greece, because from Greece Italy got beautiful stories. In the old, old times when Italy and Greece were as beautiful as they are now, and more beautiful because none of their temples had been destroyed, men believed there were a great many gods."

"Yes," said Bess breathlessly. "They were pagans."

"We know some of the things they believed about the gods. We have learned the stories about them. They are the most wonderful stories there are. They always will be, because they are about things that are just as true to-day as they were then. They are eternal."

"Eternal!" said Bess, as if she liked the sound.

"Do you know the story of Cupid and Psyche?"

She had heard of Cupid, possibly, he thought, in connection with valentines, but never of Psyche, and he told her.

"She should not have asked him," said Bess, at the end.

"She did n't ask anything," said Winterbourne, watching her. "She only lighted the lamp, to see."

"Yes, but it's just the same. It's just like asking people questions when they don't want to tell you."

This was the first door opened, he saw. She was fitting his word eternal to the old and making it the new. She had a mind.

"Then there were Orpheus and Eurydice."

"*Che faro* —" she breathed.

"Yes. I told you it was a love-story. But it's more than a love-story."

He paused there, and wondered how far she could follow him. What had her unmellowed mind to do with myth or nature-worship? But he risked it and leaped with her into Greece, to Persephone and the Vale of Enna. Winterbourne was a story-teller by gift. He contended that life was all one big story and the little stories were the children of it; to make them, remember them, tell them, this was not the diversion of an idle hour, but the weaving of the many-colored web of being and causing it to move in sun and wind. He grew eloquent as he went on, lured by her answering warmth, the brightness of her face. She was vividly responsive. Somehow, as he saw, he was making spring and the awakening walk before her like a procession of nymphs. As he talked, the flowers opened and before he ended, the Vale of Enna bloomed, blossom by blossom, at their feet. She clapped her hands softly.

"I like that," said she. "That's a good story. It's better than a love-story."

"But it is a love-story."

"Better than just a love-story, about a man and a woman. That's silly, half the time."

Winterbourne watched her curiously, probing for the heart of her simple mystery.

"That's only one story," he said. "When you sing your song, about Orpheus and Eurydice —"

"*Che faro?*"

"Yes. Would you rather think it's about the wind sighing and singing over the souls of the dead, or would you rather think Orpheus is a young man in love with a girl and going down into hell to find her?"

There was no choice, he saw. Her face dulled at the apparition of the young man.

"Sing it," he bade her suddenly, with a masterful vio-

lence. "Orpheus is the unhappy wind wailing over the brown earth to find the flowers. What would happen if he could call the spring back again? There would be green grass and hot sun and flowers everywhere. Sing about it—the way we feel in winter when we want the spring."

She got obediently off her stool, folded her hands, fixed her eyes on the quickened trees without, and began to sing. The tone was glorious. The light came into his eyes at the throbbing beauty of it. Bess was not longing for love and lovers. She was what he had called her, a daughter of earth, and the earth and the sun and the waters and winds called to her and moved her and caused her to be obedient to them.

"Yes," he said, when she had finished. "That's true. That's right. Now sit down and I'll tell you how we talked in Italy."

She sat down, warm-eyed and flushed by his praise, and he began to teach her simple phrases. She was very dutiful in repeating them with the extremest care, but when they multiplied, she grew restive. Then she asked, —

"Don't you think I'd better get a pencil and paper?"

He nodded, and she brought them and, in a childish hand, wrote on a book propped upon her knee. When he had done, she slipped the paper into her apron-pocket, and stood up.

"Thank you, sir," she said. "I'll learn them all before to-morrow. Here is Mr. Hunter."

Dwight Hunter had come in through the kitchen and was waiting, cap in hand, to speak. Winterbourne, seeing him, thought what a handsome boy he was, not unlike Orpheus, and wondered how this singing girl could help sending him a luring cry in her rich young voice, with a look even, to follow. But Bess was asking him only, —

"Mr. Hunter, do you know where the rest of the carrot-

seed was put? The dogs have scratched up a big place half-way down the lot; I'm going to sow some more."

"It's up in the shed-chamber," said Hunter, looking at her in a dumb way, as if it hurt him to speak to her, and yet as if he must speak. "I put all the seeds together there."

She passed him, and he came in to Winterbourne.

"Sit down, Hunter," said Winterbourne kindly. "Anything the matter? What is it, Dwight?"

The young man looked at him in the same appealing way that had yet a fierceness in it.

"I'm going to marry her," he said.

Winterbourne gripped the arms of his chair, and looked at him.

"Good God, Dwight," he said at length, "you can't marry her."

"I'm going to," said Dwight immovably, as if the words cost him something and the fact would demand of him yet more. "Why can't I?"

"She won't have you, boy. She does n't care for anything but the sun and moon."

To Dwight, who knew nothing about the touchstone of Orpheus applied to her, this was madness, but he only answered steadily, —

"She's got to."

"Well, don't hurry her, then. She's nothing but a child."

"I've got to hurry her. Lovell's gone to town."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"He's gone to get togs. He asked me who was a good tailor."

Winterbourne stared, puffing his cheeks with astonishment.

"What does he want of a tailor?" was what occurred to him to say.

"He danced with us, down at the Point."

"Lovell danced! my heavenly Belshazzar and the Milky Way! Can't men dance with a girl but they must marry her?"

"I shall ask her before he gets back," said Dwight.

He turned and left the room, and it was only when Winterbourne heard his determined stride into the kitchen that he awoke enough to take out his pipe and fill it slowly. But he read no more that morning.

Hunter went out through the kitchen where Lyddy was making puff-paste, and climbed the rough open stairs to the shed-chamber. There was Bess by the cobwebby window, at the end of the room, frowning over packets of seeds.

"I don't believe you've marked these right," said she, as he approached her. "This ain't carrot-seed."

"Bess!" said Hunter.

She looked up at him, unmoved. Everybody was in the habit of calling her Bess, but his voice carried a little special appeal. Dwight Hunter had never been in love. He had been a shy youth in college, and since his lonely living down here, he had had very little intercourse with women. Now he was moved beyond his own power of estimating the greatness of his emotion, and chiefly, in this new barbaric way, because she seemed to him so different from any other girl, not only because he loved her but because she was so simple, so innocently bold and free. A self deeper than his conscious one seemed to assume that because his mind was so tumultuously toward her, hers must be as swiftly seeking him.

"Bess!" he said. He held out his hands to her in a boy's fashion. "Bess, I'm awfully fond of you."

One of his hands touched her sleeve. She felt it, and the blood surged into her face. Dwight Hunter felt a stinging blow on one cheek and then the other.

"Find me the carrot-seed," said a stern maiden voice. "Then you go down those stairs and don't you speak to me again."

He stood for a moment looking at her. What temptation assailed him to strike down the woman, bind her in his arms with primal violence, and walk down the stairs with her slung over his shoulder, he did not then tell. She was not looking at him. She still sought, with a cruel patience, among the rough seed-papers. Suddenly he awoke. He swept one paper out from the others, with a motion of his hand.

"There 's your carrot-seed," he said, as if it were a blow, and walked away through the length of the chamber and down the stairs.

Bess waited with the stillness of a clever little animal. Then she picked up her carrot-seed, and went quietly down, and out to sow it.

XII

MRS. RAMSAY, at eleven o'clock at night, was sitting by the writing-table in her study, her fretted brow propped on one hand while the other hand made careful notes on the manuscript page. The study especially hers was a little room at the head of the stairs where the sun never shone through the one window, — this not only because it faced the north, but for the pile of books and pamphlets on the sill, and Mrs. Ramsay was never in sight of the day when she could pause to move them and have the window washed. The table was scattered all over with letters and reports and dusty bundles of papers of an outworn significance, which yet, because time scarcely ran to it, could not be thrown away. Here she never found anything except after prolonged search. But that she accepted; it suggested no drastic measure of setting in order, because she had not been accustomed to finding things readily anywhere. It seemed to her a part of the inevitable difficulty of the world to steer her bark through these thick waters of circumstance. It was like living on a planet where there were perpetual thunder-showers, or one walked in the ooze of marshes. The planet was simply made that way, and the pilgrim might as well content himself.

A figure appeared in the doorway, but she did not heed it. A shadow falling on the page to which her earnest mind was glued meant only a call from the outer world which would make itself manifest, in some form of "view halloo," if it really needed to be heard. If it was the maid of general work saying Tiny had lost her rubbers, the maid would

get tired of waiting and, in a logical access of inventive zeal, find the child footgear of some sort. But sometimes, she was aware, she had to listen, and now, when a voice hailed her, she looked wearily up.

"Mum," said Tim.

She was very fond of him. Something of the first bloom of her married life clung to him. He came when a child was a wonder, and not after she had begun to think of them as little citizens who would make the ship of state move more securely if their cherished individuality could be respected. He was still a child. After his advent there was her stay in Europe, studying sociology, leaving him and his father in bemused dependence on each other. The other children came years after, but they never seemed so like princes of direct descent: only a little alien colony of the mother state.

"Are n't you gone to bed yet?" asked his mother. "Isn't it late for you?"

Tim stepped in and seated himself on a pile of periodicals, tied in bundles because Mrs. Ramsay had found that in their unbound state they had been used for fire-lighting by maids who undervalued the printed word.

"I don't go to bed with the children," said Tim. "Come on out of here, mum. Come down into the nursery. There's a fire there."

Mrs. Ramsay capped her fountain pen, placed it upright in her bag beside the table, because she meant to take an early train, and rose to follow him. Tim, too, got up from his pile of pamphlets, and they toppled after him. But he did not pick them up nor did his mother see they blocked the passage to the door. To Tim the room was predestined confusion hopeless in a fashion that nothing but fire could better; like his mother he was used to finding his way in labyrinths of her own making.

"Where's your father?" she asked, her hand on the gas. "Run along, dear. I'm going to turn this out."

"Father's gone to bed," said Tim, from the hall. "He was done up. Said old Gregory's been ugly as the devil."

"Oh!" commented Mrs. Ramsay, unmoved.

She had been used for many years to the daily temperature of old Gregory's mind. He was her husband's employer, and it seemed to her quite natural that even a head clerk should come under the changing sun of favor or disfavor. They went down the dark stairs to the nursery where Tim had been keeping up the fire after the children went to bed, lying there on the hearth, his head almost in the blaze, dreaming, not the vague deliciousness of youth, but weaving, contriving, planning, making an ignorant child's picture of a warm future.

He had taken the precaution, before he left, of drawing a big chair to the hearth and building up the blaze, to beguile his mother into staying with him while he talked. He and even the little children knew a great many things about her that she was quite ignorant of herself. They knew she was often so tired that if she could be made very comfortable — a state she never sought — she would stay and talk to them, lulled by her bodily repose. They seldom wanted it. She did not, being neither very affectionate nor beautiful, seem to them a particularly interesting person; but for reasons of state they often had to consult her in parliamentary form. So now, when she sank into the chair, it was with a little sigh of unconscious bodily weariness. She was never tired, she told people, and she needed little sleep; but yet she did have periods of lethargy when she thought she was thinking. Timmy knew better. He knew mother was done up. He took a chair at the other side of the hearth, because he wished to impress her, and Mary, the maid, had so often exhorted

him not to "sprawl about so," that Timmy understood sprawling to be unlovely.

"Mother," said he, "do you know anybody that's got any money?"

"Why, no," said Mrs. Ramsay. "I don't know that I do. Why, yes, I suppose I do. A great many of our club members are influential women. I suppose they have money. Why, yes, I suppose I know people who have money."

"I want money," said Tim, "the worst way."

"Well, I dare say your father can give you some," said Mrs. Ramsay. "How much do you need?"

He passed that over as the link he was not yet ready to forge.

"You know, mum," he said, "I think I've got a good thing. If I let you in, will you keep still till I tell you to speak?"

"Don't you think you'd better go to your father?" she asked dreamily. Her mind was not on him. A delicious sensation that she described next day as the sort of moment when we feel at one with life was stealing over her; but she was really sleepy with the liberty to indulge it.

"I can't," said Tim decisively, frowning at the fire.

"Oh, yes, I guess you can. Why can't you?"

"Father ain't a practical man. I've got to have practical men go in with me, and I've got to have some money to keep up my end."

"Your language does n't always please me, Timmy," said his mother, without severity, conscious of the warmth of the fire on her knees. "I am surprised that a young man of your antecedents and training should find the slightest temptation to say 'ain't.'"

"The amount of it is," Timmy continued, "we want money. We need it, mum. We need it mighty bad."

"The rich man is not the man to be envied," said Mrs.

Ramsay. "It is the good citizen, the man who carries his wealth in his heart and head."

"Look at dad," said Tim in dispassionate argument. "Did you ever see such a poor old crow picking up corn in the same field he's been tottering in for a hundred years? Why, dad's a sight."

"Your father is not an ambitious man."

"Ambitious! I should n't think he was. He's been squeezed so hard the blood's all out of him. He ain't ambitious nor anything else. He's got four kids to put through college: no, three,—Tonty's only a girl. She'll probably marry."

"Antoinette will assuredly have a collegiate course whether she is a girl or not," said his mother, with some severity due to her tenets of belief. She had almost concluded, "whether she wants it or not," because she knew that, as a matter of principle, Tonty would have to enter the world sufficiently equipped.

"Well, Tonty *is* a girl," said Tim. "Count her in then. Four kids to educate. How's he going to do it? Don't count me. I did n't want to go to college, and I did n't. I think I'm a polished specimen as I am, don't you, mum?"

"You seem to forget that your mother's lectures are remunerative," she reminded him.

"Oh, yes, I know, but you ain't going to keep on batting round the way you do. We've got to have an income."

"I have no doubt," said Mrs. Ramsay, with dignity, "that we shall always be able to live in a simple manner, suited to our tastes, and that the children will be properly educated. If you want a little money, dear, your father or I could let you have it. But you know my hope for you, Timmy. You know I am waiting with the greatest interest, dear, the greatest impatience, for you to decide on a profession."

Tim got up and leaned an elbow on the mantel.

"Well," he said, in a curious tone of uneasiness and rather sullen determination, as if he brought out something he could more happily have kept hidden, "I don't want a profession. I ain't fitted for it. I don't see how I could be. I don't want to study, mother. You know I can't put my mind on things."

"My dear," said his mother, "you have a well-stored mind. Think how mother used to read to you. She read to you by the hour."

"Well, what made you do it?" said Tim irritably. "I did n't want you to. I 'd much rather have been asleep. Why did n't you make me read to myself, or set me something to learn and lick me if I did n't do it? You don't any more know how to bring up a kid than you know how to fly."

"We shall all fly some time," said Mrs. Ramsay sleepily. His words had touched some spring in her mind, and she was responding with a pin-feather from one of her lectures. "We shall have our wings."

"Well, maybe we shall," said Tim gloomily, "but some of us 'll fly mighty near the ground, and every chance we get, we 'll roost. I tell you, mum, it 's true, and you take it from me, I ain't been brought up to do anything whatever unless I get some queer sort of a soft snap that 'll let me in for something rich. That 's so. Believe it?"

Mrs. Ramsay had nodded, and the jar awoke her. It seemed to her that she was being criticised for her educational methods, and she answered, —

"You could n't be treated like other children, dear. You were very individual."

"Well, if I was individual then, I 'm individual now," said Tim. "And the individual 's going to act. Mother, see here. I 've got an invention. That 's the head and tail of it."

Mrs. Ramsay came awake.

"My son!" she said. "You've invented something? Now, you see! you were n't like other children, and if I had driven you along the old ruts, you'd have been in them now. You have had long fallow times for thought —"

"I've been as lazy as the devil," said Tim. "That's what you mean."

"Your mind has been seething and ripening, and now the moment has come, and it has brought forth fruit. As well put a child in a strait waistcoat, as well bandage its feet like the Chinese tyrant, as forbid it the growth of its free intelligence."

"Cut it, mum, cut it," said Tim, with a restored good-nature. "That's out of a lecture. I heard it one night when I was waiting with your overshoes."

His spirit was again rising. He had taken a step he dreaded to take, and now it was done the rest of the path seemed easy. His dread had not been of telling his mother, because she, he knew, was easily approached, but the first move seemed the difficult one. He was not used to action. His long courses of dreaming over the financially possible involved nothing for himself but the tacking on a second dream when the first palled. Now he was to do.

"But," said he, "money's the thing. Money's what I've got to have."

"To get your patent," she supplied.

"No, not precisely. That'll be easy enough. I could get that out of dad. Tell him I've got to have some clothes. Show him my shoes. They'd be enough."

"That is ever the way," said Mrs. Ramsay fondly. "The inventor barter everything for his dream. Think of Benvenuto Cellini, think of the pottery man. I can't at this minute recall his name —"

"Don't go harking back to those Johnnies," said Tim

sunnily. "They're dead and buried. You think of your little flaxen-haired, blue-eyed boy Timothy, and see what you can do for him. Who's got money, mum? Who'll shell out?"

"How much does it cost to get a patent, child?"

"Never you mind. That's only the first step. We've got to manufacture. We've got to form a company."

Mrs. Ramsay brooded.

"Strange," she said, in her deep tone, "when a human exigency like this arises, how precious money is. Take the individual, the scholar,—he can scorn it. James Trenton Lovell could receive a legacy and cast it behind him—"

Tim stood up straight, as if the words had given him a shock.

"Cast it behind him?" he asked. "Where'd he cast it?"

She shook her head.

"We none of us know," she responded. "We only know James was given a legacy, and that he refused it."

"The ass!" Tim contributed. "The old moth-eaten hermit of an ass. What'd he do that for?"

"Perhaps he did n't do it." Mrs. Ramsay rose and stood closer to the fire, looking at it lovingly. She would have said, if her mental photograph had been demanded, that she was of an ascetic habit, but warmth and food and right indulgences had a soft appealing for her, not to be recognized, but ascribed to the general beneficence of the universe and its effect on her spiritual state. "Don't speak uncharitably, dear. If James did refuse it, it was from the highest motives. We can be sure of that."

Tim had forgotten her. He stood on his side of the fireplace, looking at the coals and wondering how he should have allowed himself to pass over Lovell's reputed fortune. He had heard about it. Talk had buzzed vaguely all round

it, but nobody had found out what it was, and after the first wonder, the town had gone to sleep again, according to its wont.

"I'm going over to see him."

Mrs. Ramsay was turning away to her chamber.

"To see James Lovell?" she repeated, with her unconsidered mildness. "Not to-night, dear. It's very late."

"He sits up till all hours." Tim was seeking out his hat from a pile of unassorted headgear on the hall table. "Don't fasten up, mum. I'll be in some time."

He banged the front door after him, and she heard him plunging away. She stopped to put out the hall lamp.

"Mother," said a little voice above her, and she looked up.

Tonty stood in the hall, looking over the rail. She was in her nightgown, and sleep still creased and flushed her little anxious face.

"What is it, dear?" inquired Mrs. Ramsay, ascending heavily.

"I heard something," said Tonty, in a voice subdued to the hour.

The three others, younger than she, would wake presently to a less controlled alarm, and it would be her task to comfort them.

"It was only your brother going out to make a call," said Mrs. Ramsay.

She was proceeding to her own room and Tonty followed after, in a perfect self-possession, yet trembling with her fear and the cool of the night air.

"Then it's daytime, isn't it?" she inquired, with an incredulous hope. "No, it must be evening. Do you think he's going to see Jackie?"

Who Jackie was, Mrs. Ramsay had never learned, but

it was one of her tenets that childhood must not be deceived. No chimney in her house had ever warmed to the descent of Santa Claus, no brownie had ever swept her floor, nor fairy godmother brought gifts. None of these things had happened with her knowledge, though unknown worlds thrilled about her and beat at the doors of her sleeping apprehension. And children must be told the truth exactly.

"He has gone to call on James Lovell," she replied. "Run along now and get into bed. Don't wake the others."

Tonty went obediently, and was over her sill; but at the dusky cavern of the room she hesitated and fled back again, with a soft thud of feet. Her hands almost laid hold of her mother's dress, but not quite.

"Mother," she said, "mother."

"Well, dear?" asked her mother, looking benignly down at her. "What is it? Mother's waiting for you to go back to bed."

"You couldn't —" Tonty's breath seemed to fail her, and she added weakly — "you could n't stand here and talk a minute, could you?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Ramsay kindly. "It's very late for little girls. It's late for mother, too. Run along now, and let mother see you shut the door."

Tonty went quickly, because that was the easiest way to do it. She got inside the chamber, and pulled the door softly to. That shut her inside the blackness. She felt her way to the bed, and put her hand by chance on Tiny's face, and then she might have screamed if that would not have waked three sleeping creatures who would all have wanted water. But how did she know it was Tiny's face? She had left Tiny in the bed when she heard the noise downstairs, but that was a long time ago, and many things in the history of

so dark a chamber might have happened since. She knelt by the bed, and prayed : " Please let it be Tiny." It seemed to her that she prayed a long time, and it did no good because there was no sign that it was Tiny, and it was impossible to get into bed until she had assurance. But she put her head on the bedside and then in an instant found she was saying, " Dear Jackie, let it be Tiny" ; and immediately she was so sure it was, that she could get up and slip into bed and seek Tiny's little curled-up hand.

XIII

TIM made haste to Lovell's door because, although Lovell was accustomed to sit up to all hours, this was midnight and beyond. The light was burning in his little house, and Tim, before making himself known, stepped up to the window with no attempt at caution, and looked in. There was a fire across the shining andirons, and a man sat on the straight old-fashioned sofa along the wall opposite, watching the blaze. Tim frowned at the sight, because this, seeming to be a visitor, made his coming futile; but he paused and looked again, and when the man stirred, with a familiar motion, Tim laughed out. At that the sitting figure started and turned to face him there unseen. Tim went to the door now, opened it, and walked in. It was Lovell himself sitting on the sofa and regarding him with a steadfast, unwelcoming look, apparently demanding why his solitude should be disturbed,— Lovell in fine new clothes. Tim went gravely to the mantel, took down a candle, lighted it, and walked over to the sofa. There, holding the candle at convenient points, he eyed Lovell up and down from the top of his clipped head to his obviously new shoes. Lovell met his gaze in an unmoved calm, as if it might prove a small relief to be pronounced upon. Tim returned the candle to its place, and took his host's own accustomed chair at the hearth.

“Behold,” said he, in a pleasant tone, “the bridegroom cometh.”

Lovell got up, threw a log on the fire, and wiped his hands from the powdery dust of the bark ; he wiped them on his

impeccable trousers. There was a freedom of motion in the act, indicating a purpose. He might possibly, it seemed, find more familiarity in the clothes which he was now regarding with a mixture of rage and anxiety when they looked as if they had been worn. Tim, with an elfin intelligence, read him clearly.

"Your trousers, Jim," he said, from an admiring solemnity, "are a dream, simply a dream."

Lovell seemed to glance at them, but a dogged something within him told of relief. He would need all the dreamlike garments he could get to drag him back to life long enough to accomplish one foolish but inevitable purpose.

"You ain't dressed for the part," Tim vouchsafed.

"What part?"

"Hermit."

"Don't be a fool. I never called myself a hermit."

"Nor poet," said Tim slyly.

"Nor poet, either."

"Well, you're all right, all right. You're just the same kind of a Johnnie everybody else is — except me. I couldn't sport such a cravat nor such a coat at one o'clock in the morning nor any old time, not if you were to draw me on a jury and tell me this was the uniform. You're elegant, Jim, just elegant."

"I'm a fool," said Lovell, going back to his position on the sofa. "Take it from me — a fool."

But he looked a very handsome fellow sitting there at his frowning ease, and Tim, while he conquered an inclination to laugh, generously conceded it. Again his impish intelligence told him Lovell was forswearing his old lounging-chair and taking to the sofa to practise sitting on sofas at afternoon calls. He had a deliriously happy vision of a "Book of Beauty" he had seen in his mother's attic, where a young

lady of the early sixties sat winding wool from the hands of a slim-waisted gentleman of the same period; and a wild impulse assailed him to ask Lovell if they should practise winding yarn. But this unconsidered tableau, he thought, spoke ill for his own hopes. It was a simple matter to mulct a hermit of despised gold, but not a man equipped for conquest.

"Going to book, Jim?" he inquired.

"Book?"

"For the race. Play the game, vote, call on girls —"

Lovell frowned at that, and then settled into his obstinate calm. Timothy knew then. The two girls at the Winterbournes' were at the bottom of it. If he were ever to find any trace of the old Lovell, the poet, the student, the scorner of pomps, it was time to do it now.

"Got any money, Jim?" he asked.

"How much do you want?" Lovell made an instinctive dive into his empty pockets.

"I can put you on to a good thing."

"Oh, is that all? I'm going to bed," said Lovell. The warmth of his first hour alone there opposite the fire with that new energy assailing him had gone. "Sit here as long as you like, only see the door's tight when you go."

"I'm not fooling," Tim asserted. "I know of a company that's going to be formed, and dad has n't a nickel to put into it. Say, you've got money!"

Lovell turned upon him.

"Have I, indeed?" he demanded. "Who says so?"

"All of 'em. They say you've got it, or had it. If you have n't made ducks and drakes with it, chucked it down a hollow tree or something, you give it to me. I don't mean give it to me. Put it into the company — many shares as you want."

"I don't want any shares," said Lovell.

He was standing, looking absently into the fire. How should he tell his paper and pencil that night what he saw there — what flaring winds of passion, what castles and the shapes of leaves? "What's your company?"

"I won't tell you — not unless you promise you'll think of going in with me. If you'll do that, maybe I will."

Lovell shook his head.

"No," he said, "no. I don't know anything about your companies and your shares. Come, let's get to bed. I don't want to turn you out —"

Tim picked up his hat and went, begging to the last, and Lovell, shutting the door on him with small ceremony, took the lamp and went into his bedroom. It had a good-sized mirror, taken from the big house because the poet side of him loved sumptuous things and the gilt scroll-work on it pleased him. He stood before it, lamp in hand, and looked at himself, frowning a little with the intentness of the scrutiny. What he saw pleased him but moderately, — a man of good size and bearing, with a square forehead, very direct gray-blue eyes, and a firm enough mouth with diversifying curves in it. The mouth was odious to him because his memories of what his mother and sister used to say of it were still so disconcerting. "James has a beautiful mouth," he heard his mother remark, fondly contemplating his photograph, which she insisted on keeping on the centre table propped against the astral lamp. She never looked at him when she said it, and James, with a sense that the mouth was something that was his and yet not his, used to writhe in his chair under the feeling that the idea had become so impersonal to her that she might offer it at any time, in any company.

"Beautiful!" his sister would dutifully respond, because the rule of the house was that mother, because she was mother

and had a stiff knee, must be indulged. Lovell thought that had got him into his habit of biting his lips, a vice he pursued until his mother noted it and watched him for its recurrence, saying at each downfall, "Don't do that, my son. You have a beautiful mouth."

Well, he thought, the mouth was there. It was sufficiently firm, even after all it had gone through. It was well enough. The chin was finely cut, and he elected to pay no attention to the dimple in it. What he chiefly wished to see was whether he looked in the main no worse, if no better, than other fellows who might not have had his own tawdry experience. The lamp gave him no ecstatic assurance, but it offered no facers, and he went to bed, to forget himself and what he was pretty sure was going to be the morrow's foolish deed.

But the next afternoon it was without thinking much about it, except as an act already determined upon, that, in all the austerity of his conventional gear, he went up to the Winterbournes' and knocked. He had been used to walking in, after the familiar custom of the town, for his lost evenings with Winterbourne and the Greeks; but those were behind him. He never hoped for them again, and saw before him the exacting call of a new relation miserably veiled, as yet, in doubt.

Lyddy came limping to the door, and stared at him with a frank surprise. Perhaps if he had not looked her in the eye and asked somewhat more severely than anything save a wavering will, giving itself even the advantage of a truculent port, might have counselled, she would have frankly told him how he seemed to her in his new clothes. But she informed him in detail where all the family might be found. Mr. Winterbourne and Bess — she made no halt at her familiar name — were studying in the sitting-room, Mrs. Winterbourne had gone to town with that Mrs. Ramsay, and Miss Celia was

in the garden. Lovell hesitated before her, and she divined him.

"You can go out this way, if you want," she said, her gleaming eye on his. "She's the only one that ain't busy."

So Lovell went through the kitchen and down the steps of the back door and came upon Celia pacing dreamily in the spring air, between rows of budding green. The garden, like all the Winterbourne estate, had suffered in the desertion of the owner, and he had not yet haled this flowery patch back to an assured prosperity. Bess had been digging about some of the perennials, and Hunter, seeing her, had brought his hoe and gone into the business of liberation, to please her. Finding him at work, she had given no sign of gratitude or even interest, but he was pleased to note that her own fragmentary toil went on there in early mornings before he came. She it was who had decreed the sowing of lawn-grass near the house, where Winterbourne had elected to raise carrots. Winterbourne had come out one morning and found Hunter sowing grass.

"You told me the carrots were all in," the master said, with dark suspicion.

Hunter kept on with his accurate wave and toss of the seed.

"Yes," he said. "This is grass-seed."

Winterbourne felt one of his rages coming on, but at that moment Bess walked around the corner of the house. He appealed to her: —

"Will you listen to this? I tell this fellow to put in carrots —"

But Bess came up to him. Her hair was blowing, and the light of day was in her eyes.

"Why, yes," said she, "course you've got to have grass-seed up here by the house. I told him so. You can't plant carrots round your rock-o'-door."

That was an old term for the doorstep. Lyddy made a commonplace of it, and Winterbourne loved the girl for using it in the manner of the soil. He looked at her a moment, broadly smiling, and she smiled back, in no community of understanding mirth, but because she approved of him. So the lawn was sown, and Winterbourne rejoiced in his defeat.

Celia had no inborn taste for gardens: but this one, enclosed in its high fence, gave space for solitary musing, and she wandered up and down, looking the sweetest of lone maidens, but brooding practically on ways and means. Lovell, a little dashed because she did not know him, went toward her fast, and suddenly she did place him, and held out her hand.

"How good of you to find me," she said. "I might have missed you."

Lovell had perhaps not himself realized how deeply in earnest he was. He kept her hand a moment and threw it away from him with a little fling, as if he abjured all the helps to courage. But after all, what had he to say to her? Could he begin, "I have chosen to confess to you, because you are a beautiful young woman and I am afraid you will not be pleased"?

"It is so warm," Celia was saying, in a clear voice tuned to his insufficient hearing.

She looked at him with large and reflective eyes, thinking, in the undercurrent that went on in her now all the time, that here was a unit of the millions more fortunate than she and bound to serve her if she could but combine them rightly, knowing he was predisposed toward her and wondering how she might take the best advantage of the moment. The beginning was to talk to him. "Come down into the grape arbor," she said. "I've been sitting there."

He followed her, his throat dry with indignation against himself for walking into a corner where he must needs appear like a fool to get out again. In the arbor she sank into one of the wicker chairs, looked at him with her pleasant smile, which was yet not warm, and waited. He took in her look, like a picture hung before him, the slenderness of her, the pretty dress with its light green stripe and the green ribbon at her waist, the warmth of her hair, and the pure outline of her cheek. He felt dizzily for a moment that he did not know whether he had spoken or not, and then said, in what instantly sounded to him like a voice too rough, —

“You don’t know me.”

Celia was still looking at him with that cool, clear smile.

“I know you are a poet,” she said in a low voice, and asked herself inwardly, in that unconscious way she had of referring all her words and acts to a standard of æsthetic meaning, whether the tone had been thrilling enough to fit that word.

He made a slight outward motion of the hands, as if all that he cast to the abyss of unconsidered things where talents, genius even, might lie while he sought the mere basis for human living.

“Don’t say that,” he adjured her. “Has anybody told you anything about me?”

Immediately that seemed to him asinine, because there was no reason why anybody should have spoken of him. But she was smiling at him in a bewildering way and assuring him that they had. All the time she was wondering, in a disengaged inner chamber of her brain, what he had done with the money they said he threw away. It seemed the height of folly or the top of splendor to throw away money Bess could use to such advantage.

“I could understand,” she told him. “I understand per-

fectly. That's exactly how a poet would feel. I'm awfully proud of myself because I could partly understand."

He stared at her in an unbelieving gratitude. She must mean, he knew, that old plague spot in his life, the young folly that had helped bewilder his mother's days, and had bound his sister to him in a passionate desire to make up to him for the world's odium. The money he was said to have abjured was as far from his thought as any other inconsiderable thing that might have plagued him, for a moment, to be forgotten. But here, it seemed, was the most delicate spirit of the spring bringing its own gentlest fragrant air to blow about his past and make all well.

"That's not all," he said. "Those things—that thing—is past and gone. It's an infernal folly I came to talk to you about—about my being deaf. I'm not deaf."

She was staring at him in a sweet confusion. It was Celia's endowment that, whatever seemed desirable to feel, she could really compass for the moment.

"Oh!" she said, in a maiden shame that implied the memory of the admiring comment she had thrown out that other day.

He did not make the least pretence at not remembering.

"I heard it," he said. He was rather pale now, and looking directly at her. "That's why I came. When you said it, I felt like a fool. But I thought I'd better tell you. I wanted to be an honest fool, at least."

She sat looking at him with her air of restrained emotion, really wondering what he would like her to say. She had divined the spring of humor in him, and suddenly her face crinkled into laughter. She stretched out both hands to him, not, he found at once when he put out his own to take them, in more than a spontaneous gesture of her own, having nothing to do with him. But as she withdrew them

before his hands could meet them, there seemed to be nothing incomplete in the action but, on the contrary, something very pretty.

"It's so funny!" she murmured. "Isn't it funny to you? What made you do it?"

His face relaxed, but rather grimly.

"I didn't do it to be funny," he said briefly. "I can't explain it to you. But I'd got mortal tired of talking. That seemed to be one way of getting out of it."

"But aren't you tired any more? Are you willing to talk now?"

Her charming face, still creased into mirth, was set upon him with its divided beauty of wistful eyes and smiling lips. Now he was openly answering the smile.

"I don't know that I particularly want to talk," he owned, seeking through his inner store of reasons. "But I look mighty foolish to myself for hatching it up."

"I wonder why," she reflected. She was sitting now, hands clasped over her knees, looking at him musingly.

"Well, you're a new person," said Lovell, selecting the outside of such reasons as he found. "You've come in here and brought your verdicts with you. You turned a light on me. I look like a fool, that's all I know."

"Oh, not a fool," she hastened, "a poet."

At that he frowned, and she knew at once she was snapping that string too boldly. Her face broke up again into smiling.

"It's funny," she declared. "It's awfully funny. Don't be sorry you did it. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

"Don't be sorry I've been deaf?" he said good-humoredly, getting on his feet, and looking down at her. "Well, I'll try not. Only you can remember I'm not deaf

any more. I've got back my hearing. That's what old Mrs. Staples said when Winterbourne sent her a trumpet."

"How did he send her a trumpet? Sit down and tell me."

That was a new pretext for keeping him. But Lovell did not sit down. He walked a few steps through the arbor and broke off a twig. With this in his hand, to snap again into infinitesimal lengths, he felt more at ease. He had nervous hands that communicated their needs swiftly to his brain.

"Oh, I don't know exactly how it was. Only she came here—no, her daughter came a while ago and demanded an ear-trumpet. He happened to have one on hand; so he gave it to her."

"What a curious thing to have on hand! You speak as if it were a pencil or a piece of soap!"

"It is curious, but that's the way it was."

She was looking up at him, her face brimming over, and before knowing what brought its accession of mirth, he smiled back at it.

"You could say he happened to have another ear-trumpet round," she hinted, "or a sovereign remedy for ears, and that's what cured you. That's why you aren't hard of hearing any more."

He started.

"My king!" said he. "You don't mean to tell me I've got to stop being deaf?"

"But you've confessed it. So you're not deaf, are you?"

He shook his head in a droll bewilderment.

"I never thought it was going to let me out of the advantage I'd gained. If I had —"

"You would n't have done it?" she challenged him.

"I should have thought twice."

"Well!" Instantly she sobered into a sympathetic tenderness, and Lovell felt small and young. "It would be a shame to take it away now you've got used to it. I'll tell you what we'll do. You shall be deaf to all the rest and not to me."

It was said with an air of bright discovery, and Lovell almost shouted, he was so pleased with it.

"That's exactly it," he assured her. "That's what I should like above all. So you see it's brought me luck."

"What luck?"

"Why, we've got a secret together. Maybe you don't call that luck. I do." He sobered, and his voice showed softened recollection. "It's brought me luck before this."

"What, Mr. Lovell?"

"Well, it brought Winterbourne. He heard I was deaf, and what does the old dog do but bring me down a trumpet, the twin to old Mrs. Staples's. When I saw him and his honest phiz and the trumpet in his hand — well, I laughed, but I could have cried. But I asked him in, and we had it out together, and you might have heard him roar from here to Dixie." He paused there, looked reflective, then looked foolish, and added, "He left the trumpet though — and to-day I brought it back."

"To-day? now? You have n't it with you?"

He nodded and took out pan-pipes from his pocket, the innocent-looking little wonder-worker that to-day everybody knows the outline of. Celia put out her hand for it, regarded it curiously, and set it to her ear.

"No," said Lovell, "it's not for you."

But he gazed at her with a keen regard, tenderly even, and wished he had some artist's immortal presentment of her as she looked then, like youth or beauty holding the shell to her ear, listening to — what? Time, perhaps, the presage of

eternity. But when the delicate pose had lasted long enough, she was looking at him, at last, and smiling.

"Could you hear the grass grow?" he asked her.

"Almost."

"I'm going to let you laugh at me again," said Lovell. "I'm so unused to making calls, I wanted a reason. I took the trumpet. I thought if I found you all together I'd make that the pretence. But if I found you alone I should just offer my confession and be absolved."

"And what shall I do with the trumpet?" She was looking at it drolly now, as if such helps to living were jokes to her immortal youth. "Keep it to hear the grass grow?"

"Give it to Winterbourne, if you will, and see he puts it away. It's too valuable to be left lying round."

Celia came to her feet, because she saw he was really going. Besides she felt him to be cleverer than she, and the interview was, she felt, being left at precisely the right point.

"Well, we've got our secret," she said brightly. "It makes me feel about five."

Lovell shook his head.

"I feel more than five," he told her. "Sometimes I feel about seventy-five. But I don't object to a secret. Listen. I'm going to prove to you that I'm not deaf."

"But you told me."

"I'm going to prove it. I'll tell you what is going to happen in a minute. Your sister has run up into the shed-chamber. I heard her speak to Lyddy, and then step on that first creaking stair. Winterbourne is coming. I smell his tobacco. Tim Ramsay is coming in through your side gate. I heard him shoo the cat. Now I'm off. Good-by."

He looked about him, evidently for a way of escape that should not bring him face to face with the incursion he had foretold, saw the clear place in the fence where the grapevine

had not found the top, and, regardless of new clothes, went over. Celia, remembering his face as it had smiled upon her, decided that he did more than refrain from objecting to a secret. He liked it very much.

Winterbourne, true to prophecy, appeared in the doorway, smoking his pipe.

"O papa," Celia called to him, "here's your ear-trumpet."

XIV

WINTERBOURNE advanced, smiling wryly, and Tim, who had followed him through the dining-room, came on behind.

"I begin to think," said Winterbourne, "that if I opened the almanac at random, I should find in the margin, 'About this time look out for ear-trumpets.' What's the thing pursuing me for? Where'd you get it, Celia?"

"Mr. Lovell brought it. Is n't it wonderful, papa?"

Winterbourne smiled quizzically at her. By this time he knew her trick of pretty, unmeaning speech. Tim had taken pan-pipes out of his hand, and went round in a mock excitement, listening at the region supposedly of Winterbourne's heart, and then at a spider's web where a fly was buzzing. But Winterbourne, his eyes drawn that way, lifted the fly out of the web of doom, delicately unwound the threads with his great fingers, and set him free. Celia, watching him, found it an attractive thing to have done, and wondered why she had n't thought of it.

"Listen," she said to Tim. "You can hear the grass grow."

"There's only one place where you can hear the grass grow," said Winterbourne. His face took on that soft, fine look it had when his mind travelled miles and miles at lightning rate, to unknown beauties whereof it knew the secret.

"Where is that, papa?"

"It's in Schubert's *Frühlingsglaube*. I swear you can hear the roots."

"I'm going to make your sister sing into this thing," Tim announced.

"Simple Simon," said Winterbourne, "pan-pipes 'is n't for you. Wait fifty odd years till you 've grown to it."

"What is there so grand about the thing anyway?" Tim wondered. "What makes it so much better than any other trumpet?"

But Winterbourne had no notion of talking mechanism with the feckless loon he thought Timothy to be. Besides he was telling Celia something.

"I wish I 'd known Lovell was here. He's done me an ill turn."

"No, papa, not really?"

"Lovell has n't printed anything for years, and now he's gone and written up the Valley of Birds, and sent it to the *Sun*."

"Now what is the Valley of Birds, papa?"

Tim was wandering about, directing pan-pipes here and there, and finally mounting the kitchen steps.

"Put that in the drawer of my desk when you're done with it," Winterbourne called. "The upper right-hand little drawer."

He, too, was preparing to wander away, for he was not at ease in solitude with Celia. Her comments, her questions, were after a prearranged model. Bess, he would have said, had the old habit of wonder. She belonged to the childhood of the race. She was unspoiled.

"But the Valley of Birds?" Celia reminded him.

"Well!" he paused to make a story of it. "You see the lower part of my land, down there where the carrots are, opens into a lane and the lane leads to a good big stretch of woods. They're first-growth pine. They're monarchs. You've got to bow the knee. But before you get in among them there's a fringe of light wood, birch, poplar. Just about now it's divine. Well, inside the shade the birds seem

to know they can have it their own way. They come earlier there, they sing louder, they seem to sing longer in the year. I've called it the Valley of Birds, that's all."

"But what's Mr. Lovell done to it?"

"Why, the devil possessed him, and he's written a pretty essay about it and told where it is, the fool, and students in nature-study and old ladies with spy-glasses'll come down here to find it. And if they do, I'm blest if I don't send them over to Lovell's and tell them he's a distinguished author and wants to be interviewed. Blest if I don't!"

He walked off muttering maledictions, but with a face as sunny as the day, and Celia, looking after him, thought he was very handsome but his manners were most unrefined. She went slowly in, musing on Lovell now, her pretty brows knitted.

"Where's my sister, Lyddy?" she asked in the kitchen.

Lyddy was taking her afternoon rest by the window in the sun.

"Up in the shed-chamber," she wakened to answer briefly, and Celia turned back and climbed the old rough stairs.

The door was open and she paused there to look at Bess, seated by a cobwebby south window, and asleep. She had on her print morning dress, and her sleeves, rolled up a little, left her white wrists free. She had thrown her head back in the chair, and Celia, regarding the beautiful outline of it and the serious, sweet look of her flushed face, thought she seemed more a young mother than a girl. Her eyes came open suddenly and met her sister's.

"What is it?" she asked quietly, without stirring. Celia went in and sat down on a stool at her feet.

"What makes you stay up here?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Bess. She glanced about her, as if to seek some sufficient reason. "It's kind of away from everything. It smells good, too, — herbs and old things."

Celia had a moment of considering whether Lovell was too young a man to be expected to do anything for Bess. If he had been an old man, it would be simple. After all, it was really only borrowing money on the security of a voice. Perhaps, even with a young man, it was simple. At least nothing would be lost if he liked her, and nothing was more likely than that he should, for he was half hermit in his tastes, and here was Bess making the shed-chamber her retreat.

"Mr. Lovell has just called," she said.

"Has he?" asked Bess, with no appearance of interest.

"He looked very handsome."

But this Bess did not answer, and Celia, looking up at her, saw that she was frowningly, yet with delicacy, extracting a fly from a cobweb on the pane. Rescues seemed to go in pairs that day.

"Do you think he's handsome, Bess?" insisted Celia.

"Handsome?" echoed Bess. She had unwound the last filament from the fettered gauze and now set the prisoner free outside the window. "I guess so. It don't make so much difference about men-folks anyway. If they're strong and well, that's enough."

Celia looked at her a moment and then burst out laughing. This was a real laugh, not her tinkling accompaniment.

"I should think you were Lyddy," she cried. "O you darling thing!"

XV

IT was not many days after this that Bess, sweeping off the front steps to save Lyddy's old bones, saw a little figure full of haste, yet dignity, advancing up the path. It was Tonty, clad in blue checked gingham and anxiety, no hat on her smoothly braided brown hair, and a little willow switch in her hand. That Tonty always carried when she walked abroad, because she was afraid of Tom Peasley's turkey-gobbler. She stopped a couple of feet short of the flight of steps, and regarded Bess with some surprise and much pleasure, evidently having expected to encounter Lyddy.

"Is Jackie at home?" she asked.

She had heard Winterbourne's name, but chiefly from her mother's lips and those of persons inclined to stiffness and willingness to be grown up, and she made no doubt that Jackie was his own best name.

"Who, little dear?" Bess answered, with a desire to get her arms about the womanly figure.

"Is Jackie at home?"

Winterbourne himself now came round the corner, smoking his morning pipe and picking his way on the flagstones bordered by the newly springing grass.

"Well, my buttons!" said he. "If here is n't the lady of the manor and the Maid of the Mist! I do feel honored, mum."

He took out his pipe and knuckled his forehead in good old English style. But Tonty found no awakening laughter. Her face broke up into relief and happiness and misery,

and when he reached her on the walk, she set upon him and clung.

"O Jackie," she choked, "Tony's awful sick."

"Tony sick?" he asked her gravely. "Where's mother?"

"Mother's gone to Cleveland. Is it far?"

"Pretty far," Winterbourne replied grimly. "But Hades is n't," he added, with an afterthought of Mrs. Ramsay and her disordered house. "Never you mind, ladykin. I'll get my hat, and we'll see what's the matter with old Tony."

"Shan't I go with you?" Bess was asking.

She had set her broom inside the hall closet, and given her sleeves a downward smooth, to make them ready for the street. Her eyes were warmly questioning. Winterbourne knew through the certainty of his natural understanding of her that she was on fire to get into a house where there were dirt and children.

"Come along," he said. And when he had got his hat and Bess had slipped a bottle into her pocket, he took Tony's hand and they walked off down the street, Bess following.

Tonty had looked doubtfully and somewhat jealously on the prospect of a third on their quest, but Bess having the insight to fall behind, her presence was not really challenged. It came out now, in the course of judicious questioning, that Tony had been coughing for several days, but to-day he lay on the sofa and said he could n't get up, and bade them bring him plum-cake. And Mary, the cook, had been sick upstairs, and Tonty felt he ought to be denied plum-cake, but there was no one to ask. Besides there was no plum-cake to give him. Then they were at the slipshod old house, and Tonty, scrupulously standing aside to let the strange lady enter, and vaguely conscious of the confu-

sion to salute her, wished, in her little anxious soul, she had taken care of Tony herself.

"Here we are," said Winterbourne. "This is our room."

He threw open the nursery door, and Bess went in. Tony was lying on the sofa, his small person flanked by offerings from the nursery store. Tin soldiers were there, a set of clothespins Winterbourne had painted for Tonty long ago, and helped her dress in petticoats, and the tops of the establishment, three mangled and one in health, were waiting for the master hand to spin them. Tiny and Teeny sat in little chairs in the exact middle of the room, having been put there by Tonty at her departure, lest they should either take fire at the coals or come too near Tony's delirious grasp. Tony himself was red in the face, really, Tonty knew, from roaring for each particular thing he wanted and exacted as the tribute of one nigh unto his end. He cocked one eye at Winterbourne, and then closed it. He was not altogether pleased at the advent of grown-ups. Tony had counted on a superior day.

Bess went forward to him in a silent haste. She knelt on the floor, and looked at him, felt his hands and his skin, and held one of his solid wrists in hers.

"What is it, boy?" she asked.

Tony opened both eyes a slit and seemed to investigate her motives. But he closed them tight again, and groaned distressingly. Winterbourne was frowning with anxiety.

"What do you think, Bess?" he inquired. "Think I'd better call Pelham?"

"Mary's been sick upstairs just the same way," Tonty volunteered. Her smooth forehead was tied into knots of care. "Mary got sick as much as a week ago, and first she talked all the time and her face was red just like Tony's, and we carried her up all our things to see if she'd like 'em, and

when father came home at night he got the doctor. And the doctor sent her away to Mary's sister's. But Tony's sick just the same way."

Bess had put her hands under Tony's arms, and now she lifted the firm little body and set it upright. She was all of a smile, and Winterbourne, watching her, thought her a witch of a girl who seemed to know nothing and yet was unfailingly on deck.

"Tony," said she, "can you find me some molasses?"

Tonty stared at her. This was far from anything she had expected.

"In the kitchen I could," she returned dutifully.

"We'll go into the kitchen to make it. Tony's got to have molasses candy. If we sent for the doctor, that's what he'd say, first thing. I guess mother wouldn't mind, would she?"

"Oh, no," Tonty replied, in a conviction devoid of bitterness. "Mother wouldn't mind." She could have explained that mothers were sleepy beings whose only care was lest they should not find something or catch the train.

Bess took Tiny and Teeny each by the hand, and gave Winterbourne a beckoning glance.

"Here we go into the kitchen," said she, "to make the candy for Tony. It's too bad Tony's too sick to go, but maybe he'll be better by the time the candy's started."

Tonty showed the way, and Winterbourne followed on, knowing it was expected of him, but he had an illuminating glimpse over his shoulder at a little figure sitting bolt upright on the couch, eyes shining and body in a tension to be up and in the midst of the molasses carnival.

In the kitchen was Harriet Beale, a willing, slipshod girl of sixteen, working her way through a multitude of last night's dishes. Harriet saw no reason for washing

dishes until the present supply gave out, and nobody in this figment of a home seemed to have preferences to a counter effect. She was not surprised at their advent, having long ago learned not to expect the sky to fall in the regulation way at the Ramsays'. It always fell criss-cross, or had a fashion of slumping down in the middle. She found the molasses for them, and the butter, and washed a spider, old to the point of an artistic smoothness, and Bess measured with what seemed a careless hand but was masterly from long practice, and as she mixed and stirred and the smell of hot molasses filled the air, she sang.

Three children stood a pace away and looked at her, and Winterbourne, sunk into a big chair in the kitchen corner, watched her and let his mind wander back to the simpler times when earth maidens such as she enthralled the hearts of men and helped them turn the soil from wildness into garden. She seemed to belong there, in the old, old time before the pageant of life had begun to shine brighter than life itself. She was singing little songs to gay measures, not always with words to them, and he found himself charmed and dulled by them as if she had expected him to be; and when he remembered the children he saw they, too, were charmed.

But there were four children now instead of three. Tony had come slowly and softly in from the nursery, at first like a little criminal lest he should be questioned and made to remember his chosen state of solitary invalidism, and then, when he found himself ignored, quite boldly, as one who had returned to his lost manhood. Still singing, she poured the candy into its tins, and set the tins in water, and when the brew had hardened slightly, creased it into squares. Then she allowed the spell to break.

"Three pieces apiece this forenoon," she said to Tonty.

"Three this afternoon. Not any more until to-morrow. Harriet 'll give them to you and set what 's left in the upper cupboard. Now let's come out and play in the old sleigh."

But they waited for it to cool, and then went most gayly, the twelve pieces in a little dish in Tonty's hand. And when they were settled in the sleigh under the grapevine that straggled from the sweet-bough tree to the fence, Winterbourne and Bess left them there and went home together. He was wondering at her, looking at her now and again from under his heavy brows.

"Bess," said he, "how did you know there was an old sleigh to play in?"

She was walking happily along, pleased with the spring air, glad he was beside her, and all a pleasant warmth from the kindly sun. Now she returned him a little glance of surprise.

"Saw it there from the front walk," she said, "when we went in."

"How'd you know Tony was shamming?"

"Oh, anybody could tell that. He had n't any pulse to speak of. His skin was just as moist! And did n't you hear her say the girl had been sick upstairs and they'd carried her up things? Why, he got on to that quick as a wink. He saw that's the way to get things."

"Well, is he going to keep on shamming when he wants to get things?"

Winterbourne felt his own ignorance beside her. She seemed to him the universal guardian of mankind, dowered by nature with all sorts of knowledge needed for the upgrowing of the race. But only thoughts of the simplest were hers, if indeed she thought at all. She was going along at a fine free pace, swinging a little lilac switch she had picked up, and flicking her skirt with it.

"Oh, no," she said, "it has n't gone far. He'll forget all about it by night. They'll only remember the candy. Except Tonty. She's the kind that remembers everything."

Winterbourne felt a sudden desire to know her better.

"Are you the kind that remembers everything?" he asked.

She took it with the greatest simplicity, and seemed to think a moment before she answered.

"I don't know," she said then, gravely. "I don't dwell on things. I don't have time."

"Do you think you work too hard?"

Tenderness lay in his tone, and it made her turn to him.

"Oh, no," she said, in some surprise. "I'm strong as a horse. No, I guess I never've worked too hard. But Celia —" a swift radiance passed across her face — "Celia's made different. It's well she did n't have to do the things I have. They'd have broken her down."

"But Celia has n't any gift as you have." He said it involuntarily, longing, as he often did, to know exactly how she looked upon her own endowment.

"Has n't any gift?"

She was puzzled, he could see.

"No. You can sing, and Celia can't."

"I'm sick and tired to death of all this talk about my singing." She was not only sick and tired but irritated, too, and that, breaking the surface of her gentleness, made him see how honestly she felt it. "Singing's no great shakes. I should think anybody could sing."

"But they can't. Don't you know they can't?"

"No, I suppose they can't," she conceded doubtfully.

"Bess, you must n't say things are n't any great shakes."

"Must n't I, sir?" She turned to him liquid brown eyes full of an adoring dutifulness. "Then I won't."

"Why don't you ask why you must n't?"

"I don't need to, sir. If you tell me to do anything, I'll do it."

This moved him to such despairing love of her that he had to say rudely, to counteract it, —

"Bess, you're disgustingly servile. You're always doing what everybody wants you to. You've no will of your own."

"Have n't I, sir?" she asked him; but at the moment she said it, a picture flashed upon her of Dwight Hunter turning away from her, the blood rushing into his cheek after that sounding blow.

"Not a jot." He was working himself up to move her if he could. "But when it comes to the one thing you might do and ought to do, you won't hear to anybody."

"I'll hear to you, sir."

A sweet trouble was upon her face. He knew that without looking.

"You won't sing."

"I do sing, sir. I sing a lot."

"Yes, but you won't give up your life to it. Look how you charmed those kiddies this morning. Why, you could charm everybody — folks that are sick, Bess, folks that are in trouble. Don't you want to charm 'em?"

Her eyes swam in tears. She made a little involuntary motion like, he thought, the impulse to touch his arm.

"Have I got to, sir?" she asked imploringly.

"What the devil makes you hate it so?"

"I don't hate to sing. I hate to have on tight clothes — and long under my feet — and slippers that hurt me — and tell lies about what I know and where I've been. I hate to be shut up in a room with a lot of people and sing to them. The air gets bad. It makes me sick."

All kinds of appeals were in her voice. She seemed to be beseeching him to deliver her from a slavery she abhorred, and

he thought of the savage, used to free air, caught by civilization and succumbing to white men's miseries.

"Well, Bess," he said, "I give it up. There ought to be a forest primeval for you and me."

"Yes, sir," she said, almost, his ear told him, on the verge of tears. "I'd go anywhere with you."

That was beautiful but also startling, and set him wondering how, when life was over for a man and he had settled down to translating Theocritus, things should grow so exceedingly queer about him. But they were at the side door and Dwight Hunter was coming out of the yard. He was frowning and giving the last turn to a handkerchief about his fingers.

"Hurt you?" Winterbourne asked.

Dwight shook his head.

"Not much. I was moving some of the old planks to clean the cellar and got a sliver a yard long. I can't find the whole of it."

"Give me a try. Then Bess'll do it up for you."

Winterbourne innocently saw her again ministering to humanity in this day of hurts and hypochondria. But she dealt him his next surprise.

"I guess you can get it out," she said to Dwight, and walked by him to the house.

He gave an involuntary wince of pain of one sort or another, the hurt finger or the mind, and kept his way.

"It's all right," he called back to Winterbourne. "Pelham's over here in his buggy, waiting for some tomato-plants I've got for him. He'll fix me up."

But when Winterbourne went in, Bess was waiting for him in the hall. She looked a shade paler perhaps, but she spoke indifferently:—

"Do you think he's hurt?"

"If he is, you don't deserve to be told," said Winterbourne, regarding her with a growing smile. He liked to see human nature come out under velvet disguises, and he wondered what there was about Dwight Hunter to make a girl hate him. "I thought you were a kind of angel, Bess; but I guess you're a little devil after all."

"Yes, sir," said Bess meekly, "I guess I am."

Then she took her broom from the hall closet and went out to finish sweeping the front steps.

But that night she had an errand to do, and stepped away through the dusk. Bess had a heavy heart that night and an angry mind. Her mind had been telling her how foolish it all was, what she was going to do, and she had an irritated sense that she ought not to have been forced by the nature of things to do it. But that something inside us which insists upon orderly deeds told her she had really got to take a walk and make a speech. Her way led her to the west along an elm-bordered busy road and over the vocal Sutton that was little more than a brook, though from the courtesy of remembered spring floods, it had to be called a river. Here she stopped and sat down, in the old attitude of the thoughtful or musing, on the high rail where generations of schoolboys had hacked their names. The stream was small now and flowed silently, but the moon glinted in it and that invited her. She was in a mood so still that it might have been called sadness if she were ever sad, but her muscles were always too healthfully strained, her blood always flowed too normally, to allow of that. If she could have looked at herself as Celia was always looking on at her own inner complexities, she would have said that the master control of her nature was a great obedience, a patience resultant from it.

Bess never knew why she was to be patient, only some voice told her she had to be. The rebellions of another sort

of nature would have seemed to her much like madness. As she sat here, she thought about her voice, whether it would please Winterbourne to have her take those complex and briery paths—for they were briery, however plainly they promised to be carpeted with velvet ease—that seemed to lead to that doubtful benefit called singing. If he wished it, so it must be, but she hoped, even out of her obedience, that it need never come to that. It was very pleasant sitting on the rail and communing with a moon too far away to trouble her by asking her to be something other than her calm desires bade, but her errand gave her a little reminding prick, and she rose and went stoutly, though unwillingly, on.

The road led at last to a white house, glamorous in the moonlight, for it had a porch of noble proportions, and on the pillars of it the light lay sweetly and turned it into something more beautiful even than rich men's palaces,—the hint of other countries and other times when in pillared seclusions dwelt old gods. Bess did not think of it in that way, but it seemed to her full of peace and lovely. There was no light in the front of the house, but far back in the barn at the side she saw the glint of a lantern, and went for it straight, because it seemed better than going into the house at all. When she neared it enough to see that the light was stationary within, not swinging as a man did chores at night, she came face to face with the great door, and stood there a moment listening, looking also at what she had not expected.

Dwight Hunter, surrounded by monstrous shadows, stood in the dark seclusion of the barn. He was at a bench, rubbing down a piece of wood, and as he lifted it to sight across it critically, she had no difficulty in seeing what it was: the curved leg of a highboy, still in the rough but tending in the right line. As she stood, about to speak, he gave a little exclamation, and threw down the wood. Then he stood star-

ing frowningly at her where she waited in the dark, but, the unrecognizing look on his face told her, not seeing her. Now it seemed for the first minute that she was spying upon him, invading his solitude, and she advanced, speaking his name, too timidly, she found, to suit her own ideas of the commonplace nature of the errand she had come on. So she said it again, more firmly, and it sounded like defiance. In the instant she had time to see how fagged he looked, with that expression of youth undone which is not in the least like the tiredness of age. It is the aspect of the sturdy man who has run a race. There was sadness in his eyes. It made them pathetic, and seeing that, her motherly heart yearned inquiringly toward him, and then caught itself back again with a species of anger. He was alert now, aware of her step and the outline of petticoats; but when she came forward into the circle of light, he gave an incredulous, —

“Good God! what are you here for?”

He had been thinking of her while he worked, and now that she appeared like the embodiment of a dream, he was, though amazed, not greatly so, for the dream lingered and she seemed the unreal phantom it had woven. She spoke at once: —

“I came to beg your pardon.”

“My pardon!” he echoed in amaze. “What do you want to beg my pardon for?”

Her cheeks reddened, he could see in the lantern-light, and her eyes awoke with that defiance he had more than once called into them. But she was determined to be good and she spoke steadily: —

“For what I did.”

He knew what she had done; his cheek, he had thought more than once that day, burned with the memory of it. He had meant, in moments of furious recollection, to pay her

back, not in blow for blow, but some mortification of the mind that should put her in her place; for after all she was just a girl, and it need n't turn her into a raging fury to know a man was in love with her. Again he had wondered, in pauses just as fierce, how if he paid his debt in kisses. But seeing her alone in the poor hospitality of his shop, and having, hard-worked as he knew she was all day, walked so far to make her reparation, the evil spirit went out of him, and he took up the piece of wood he had thrown on his bench and held it out to her.

"Want to see what I'm doing?" he asked.

She did want to, and suddenly grateful to him for not leading her along the road of her mortification, she took it and said quite humbly, —

"It belongs to a highboy. Do you mend them?"

"I'm always mending old truck." The tired look had gone out of his eyes; his face was eager and strong again with the color flushing in. "Come here and see."

He took up the lantern and turned to the back of the barn. Bess followed him, and then she became aware that she was in a colony of bureaus, tables, chairs, all old, some pathetic in their dilapidation, some in a perfect state, yet evidently awaiting the gloss which should proclaim them ready for their place again in the world. It all bewildered her.

"Why," said she, "I did n't know you were in the furniture business."

"I'm not," said he, with the carelessness of the man who is displaying his own weakness, yet not calling notice to it. "But I can't help working on old things. I can't help buying 'em and putting 'em to rights. I say to myself I'll sell 'em, but I don't."

"You can't, can you?" said Bess, with unexpected comprehension. "I don't blame you. I could n't either."

He could have thrown up his hat, if he had had one, and uttered a barbaric yell. She actually understood. She could speak, too, his language. But he bent over a sewing-table and said, in a melting voice she conceived to be for the table alone, —

“Do you like this?”

“It’s inlaid,” said Bess, passing her hand delicately along the front.

What sprang in his mind was the resultant query, “Won’t you let me give it to you?” But this he had sense enough to suppress, saying instead, “It’s the last thing I finished.”

Then they walked up and down aisles of dusky wood, and he held the lantern here and there to show new beauties and flaming possibilities in one-legged things that had been barbarously used. No suspicion touched him that this was a simulated interest to make their reconciliation the more lasting. He had a clear comprehension of Celia’s ardent likings for whatever her protagonist liked, and could smile at them even while he approved, knowing they were the ways of a girl; but Bess, he knew, was different. He would even have said she had no time to concern herself with the tricks of other mating creatures, bound, in spite of themselves, to carry on nature’s ancient will. But one question he did put, from his desire to know more about her and come into the country where she lived, as she to-night had entered briefly into his.

“What makes you like old furniture?”

“I don’t know,” said Bess, with her direct honesty. “There was a good deal of it in the tavern where I worked. I used to rub it. They did n’t make me, but it needed it, so I did.”

This recalled him to the hardships of her life, as he saw her at Winterbourne’s day by day. Dwight loved to work with his own hands, but he was uneasy in seeing these women-things, with the bloom of youth upon them, too hard bestead.

"You're tired," he told her. "Sit down in this chair. It was great-grandfather's. I found it in the cellar."

That was the tone she resented, the tenderness of it, and instantly her panoply of heightened color and stiffened neck was upon her. But she had determined to be good, and the thought was really present with her. She turned about, and he also, to let the light of his lantern lead her to the door.

"What makes you like it?" she said, with a last effort to make the penitential journey complete—"old furniture?"

He had put the lantern out, by a swift dash, and now he set it down and was walking with her to the gate.

"I don't know exactly," he said. "I fixed over one piece—it was mother's little sewing-chair—and then I wanted to do some more. I guess I like wood. I like the grain of it, the way it comes out. I always thought I'd like to make a fiddle."

Bess turned to him there in the moonlight with a stirring of the first acknowledged interest he had ever roused in her.

"Can you play?" she asked. "Can you play the fiddle?"

"Why, yes, a little," said he, thinking not of the fiddle but the harmonies in her voice.

"Could you play in concerts?" she challenged him. There was excitement in her tone, even beseeching.

"No, of course I could n't. I've spoiled my hands besides. Look how I've worked."

Her excitement seemed suddenly quelled, and she turned away from him in the dying dawn of that first flutter of it. For an instant she had wondered whether he stood with her in the inexplicable bond of partially knowing how to do naturally something which, the knowing had decreed, must furthermore be displayed through a forced travail, artificially.

Only he was not, perhaps, like her, pressed, to the point of cruelty, to do it.

"Good-night," she said. "I'm sorry —"

He knew this was to the end of her further abasement and said involuntarily, —

"Don't."

But she ended, neither, it appeared, hearing him or wanting to hear. "I'm sorry I did n't behave like a lady."

He was beside her on the country road, fitting his steps to hers. He meant, she saw, to go home with her. She stopped.

"Don't! You're very kind," she added, from this same stubborn desire to do her full courteous duty, "but I'm not afraid."

He only waited for her.

"I'd get my coat," he said, "if it was n't for keeping you waiting."

"I don't want you to go," said Bess, "truly I don't."

"Well, then," said Dwight, "I won't. Good-night."

But after a few rods on her rapid way, she looked back, sure of what she was to see. There he was, following leisurely. He meant, in her phrasing, to see her home, that no harm come to her. The only way to shorten the irritating situation was to walk fast, and this she did.

XVI

BESS went in at the front door and paused a moment in the hall to put the hair back from her moist forehead. She had walked as fast as she well could, to show Dwight Hunter she wanted to shake off the unwilling service of his protection as soon as possible. She knew exactly where he dropped off, at the moment the lights of home shone out for her.

"Bess, is that you?" Catherine's voice came to her from the dining-room.

Catherine was sitting at the large table there, looking over a paper she had once written on a visit to Venetian palaces. When she had realized how public-spirited Mrs. Ramsay was, it seemed to her that she ought to do something to keep abreast of events and justify herself in being. The paper was all she had to contribute to the public weal, but she was doubtful of its value, and at this minute she sat wondering whether she liked to go in to Winterbourne with it and ask him what he thought. But it was a difficult quest. She did so want to do something admirable, and yet there were no voices within her that ever told her whether she did well or ill. Intemperate admirations—these were her lot after the common judgment taught her mind which way to go, and when its approbation soured, she, too, condemned unflinchingly.

"Bess," she called again, "come here."

Bess went out to her, unwillingly, knowing she was no fit object for the judging eye. Catherine, cool and sweet in her lilac muslin, looked up at as tousled a maid as ever bacchanal

revels left to smooth a tumbled mop of hair and coax the hot blood out of glowing cheeks.

"Celia has been looking for you," said Catherine, and then, when Bess came an unthinking step further toward the lamplight, "Where have you been?"

Bess did not answer. Her doglike eyes besought indulgence.

"Where under the sun have you been?" Catherine insisted, now with a tinge of sharpness. "How you look, child! Tell me where you've been."

Then she made no secret of it. Until this moment, it had not seemed to her that she had been anywhere at all to challenge censure, but the one glimpse of Catherine, the image of the world and its proprieties, told her.

"I went up to see Dwight Hunter."

"To see him? Where did you go to see him?"

"To his house," Bess answered, in a tried beseechingness of eye and voice. "I knew where it was."

"What did you want to see him about?" Catherine persisted. Something—some infection of the girl's own emotion told her there was more in this than met the eye.

"I wanted to see him," Bess repeated; and, softly though it was, Catherine knew she would vouchsafe no more.

"But you can't go to call on young men at their houses," she told her, not unkindly. "You must n't do that sort of thing. It is n't decent."

At the word—not deliberately chosen—two things happened. Bess, her eyes now all an appealing fright, put up her head and turned it from side to side in a way of anguished petition. Were there yet more things for her to learn in a mysterious and unfriendly world? Also, Winterbourne's voice came from the sitting-room where he had his lamp and book.

"Come, Catherine, come! Don't go round inaugurating dryads into that kind of mystery."

At the sound of his voice even, whatever the words might be, Bess flew to him. He thought in alarm, as he looked up to meet her rush and onset from the doorway, that she might be about to cast herself at his feet. But she did not speak. She stopped in front of him, her hands pressed together, her eyes eloquently beseeching him. They seemed to say a great many things, and he, reading them, though imperfectly, was moved to the core. "Do you blame me?" they seemed to say. "Tell me, master, and quickly, for if you do the end has come."

This Winterbourne did not translate. He only felt the necessity of a quick rebuttal of all censure.

"Go to bed, child," he said kindly, "you're tired." Then as her eyes still questioned him, he answered them. "You're a good child. You're the best ever — yes, and the tiredest. Go to bed, Bess."

She drew a long breath, and, with one last look at him, all gratitude and warm devotion, fled up the front stairs.

Then Winterbourne heard Catherine pushing back her chair, and he knew she meant to talk it over. Bess, on the landing above, saw Celia waiting, she also ready with the cry, —

"O Bess, where have you been?"

Bess had not meant to stay for talk, but she took Celia's hand humbly and turned with her into the room. Celia's candles were lighted, yet in the dimness of the chamber she hardly saw how perturbed her sister was, though something in her air bespoke a troubled haste.

"Where've you been, Bess?" she questioned. She drew her down on the side of the bed, Bess yielding, though not willingly.

"I went up to see Dwight Hunter," said Bess. She seemed all a dogged patience.

"To see Dwight Hunter? What for?"

"I wanted to see him."

"Could n't you wait till to-morrow? He's sure to be here."

"No," said Bess. "I could n't wait very well."

"What was it?" Celia insisted. "What did you want to say to him?"

"I wanted to say I was sorry."

"Sorry! What for?"

"I slapped him," said Bess, with simplicity.

She was beginning to feel the delicious aching numbness of the body that had been active—in the open air a good deal of the time—through the long day. Celia put a hand on her shoulder and shook her gently.

"Wake up, Bess," she bade her, in a voice of laughter. "Do you know what you said? You said you slapped him."

"Yes, I did," said Bess, in her dull patience. It began to seem to her at last a little thing to have raised a pothor so inconceivably great. Or perhaps it was a large thing and she was again proven to be incompetent to meet these exigencies. "I slapped him, but I knew I had n't behaved like a lady and I went to tell him so. Good-night."

She rose, and put her arms above her head with the silent yawn which Celia meant some time to abolish in her, but which still seemed, so sweet she was, so fragrant the red mouth she opened, not undesirable after all.

"But what made you?" Celia was pressing, not believing in the heinous deed in the least, and yet having to approach what had really happened by that only possible way. "What had he done to you?"

But that was never to be told. Nor would Bess lie, for

she was going to her own room as soon as might be, to say, "Now I lay me," and it was not a square game to approach her kind personal deity save with clean lips.

"I slapped him," she repeated. "That's all."

And though Celia held her dress, ostensibly to kiss her, she was resolutely gone.

When Winterbourne heard Catherine coming, he laid down his book. Some announcing aura told him he was to discourse with her in the way that tired and terrified him because it ended nowhere. What was the use of communing, he would have said, battling with clumsy clouts of words to approach an understanding where none is? If you understand, you two souls who are talking together, you can do it without words. If you don't leap at apprehension, keep silence, for words will never help you. As he saw her coming, pathetic in the trouble of her brows, he remembered those other first days when he was ready to help halting words with kisses and appear to acquiesce while his mind was yet afar. But that day was past. It belonged to the spring of life when God Himself seemed to have decreed that kisses were a part of the substance of things. Not now. They had ceased to be a part of the game. But what she had in hand for him was neither argument nor appeal. It was pure amazed assertion.

"Everything she does is right to you, every single thing."

Winterbourne was taken by assault. Here was something that sounded like accusation, and yet the partisanship she chid him for could not be wrong.

"It is n't a sin to go to see a young man," he bade her remember, speaking mildly, taking up his book. "Not here in Clyde. When you get a nymph into your house, a creature that washes off her conscience every day in mountain

brooks, why, you must n't corrupt her by the moth-eaten rules of a blasted old world. You just can't do it, Cat."

It was the harum-scarum name he had called her in moments of their young gayety together, but it could not move her now. She was seeing how she had been wronged, by nature, by the chance of life. Her starved being was perpetually on its knees before that ineffable picture of the perfect love, and Winterbourne seemed her tyrant because he might have completed it for her and would not by a really tender word.

"Shan't I look out for her?" she persisted, rather breathlessly. "Shan't I prevent her from doing the things nice young girls don't do?"

"Yes," said Winterbourne. He laid down his book again and reminded his old irritation to lie low. "If she's got to be a nice girl. But why can't you let her be what she is? She's as clean as Venus before the sea waves were dried off. She's like a creature made out of the earth and stuck together with honey, and given fragrances for breath. See how she makes an old jaded lingerer like me sit up and remember his poetry. She's divine, Cat, because she's so human. She's all service and love and darlingness. Don't you spoil her."

He had given rein to picturesque simile because he really wanted very much to show her how desirable it would be to recognize a jewel when they had it.

"You don't say Celia's divine," his wife reminded him.

A little red spot had come upon each cheek. Her eyes had bright points in them, not of anger but of many passions blended. Winterbourne thought he might be about to return to his book, and laid a loving hand on it.

"Celia!" he said. The tone sounded to her contemptuous, so careless was it. "I don't know what Celia is. She does n't herself, yet. You've moulded her and pushed and pinched

and praised and reprimanded, until she's a kind of model of what you want her to be. She's no more like what's inside her than a corset's like a figure. The other girl's untouched."

"She pleases you," his wife continued, in her low rapid voice, that seemed to hold unspoken accusation. "Everything she does is right. You love her."

It was not the word. That might reasonably have been used to indicate a man's atmosphere toward even an adopted daughter. The tone struck him in the face, and he could not look at her for the shame of it. But he had to look, and seeing the piteousness of her agitation, he quieted himself and answered, —

"That's a big word. I don't like such big words every day."

Her face quivered into grief.

"I can't please you," she lamented, yet softly as if she were afraid to err. "I thought I could if I came back. I never can."

Winterbourne sat still, his strong hands tight on the chair-arms, thinking. Suddenly he got up and brought a seat for her.

"Sit down, Catherine," he said, out of his miserable kindness toward her. "We don't want to talk about these things. We want to look at the fire in the winter when there is one. We want to read our book in summer, or listen to the leaves swishing. That's what belongs to our time of life."

But not to hers, he knew, and her soft rebellious face told him. She had not had all her life as women count it, and the broken ideal of it she was ever holding to her breast and cherishing. He could have groaned over the pity of it, the futility.

"You think everything she does is right," she insisted.

"Well, everything she does is right, pretty nearly." Then he thought she had not cared about the sliver in Dwight Hunter's hand and chuckled a little to himself.

"Celia is as perfect as she is."

"Celia's thinking about herself," said Winterbourne. "Don't you see that's the beauty of Bess? She never thinks of herself for a minute. Her cheek's no softer than Celia's. She may not be as pretty, but she's on the side of nature, and at the same time everlasting righteousness."

Catherine sat silent for a moment. Then she opened her mouth to the saying he had heard from her lips the day they had their last talk before she went abroad, and he came down here to his solitude; it was incredible that she should ever say that thing again. There had been no answer to it then, and yet it had hurt them both so boundlessly that he could not conceive of her even mustering courage to break that ground a second time.

"You don't love me."

"Don't, dear," he said, and it was all he thought he could say.

But the kind word liberated her tongue, and indeed now she had passed into that other chamber of the house of life where, in spite of temperance and reason, old wrongs lift up their heads and claim to speak.

"Cat," said Winterbourne, "don't. Look here. It's nonsense for us to be fighting over two young baggages like these of yours, as if it made any difference anyway what we thought of 'em or what we did n't. They'll marry, and this place shall know them no more. I only tell you Bess never thinks of herself — and see where it's led us!"

He was smiling at her whole-heartedly, every nerve in him praying her not to suffer any more, and even for his poor sake to go to bed and let him decline upon his book in

peace. But she was looking at him with a blurred, wistful face.

"You mean," she mused, "it's what George Eliot tells us. Bess has learned renunciation."

"My Lord, no! I mean she's a part of the natural world. She's got sympathy. She sees what you want and does it. She knows I want my dinner in peace and a quiet hour with my book. If she could do the pesky God-forsaken things you want her to, — stand up in a long-tailed gown and sing to a horde of people that don't know bad air when they breathe it, — she'd even do that; but the poor devil! she doesn't know how. She's so natural that when you put her into your kaleidoscope and shake it up round her, she gets bemused."

"Yes," said Catherine to herself really now, "you love her."

Winterbourne felt his face grow hot, and he put a hand impatiently to his eyes, as if in an instant he expected stinging tears. His brain, the brain that gave him delight, — also some other part of him within that always told him it was the real being subservient to no sense, no organ, and these were all his servants, — his brain that ran about over the natural world and brought him back colors and scents to delight in, asked him at this point if he could answer her when she forced upon him the old issue — love. After all, what did he think of it? It was easy to abjure emotion, but when it came back in its chariot, overriding caution and the old fear of it, what was it anyway but a savage king never to be defeated, only to be deflected perhaps and leave the territory unravaged, and grass to lift its head? Winterbourne had thought he was going to be actually happy in his middle life, even in old age, and now that Catherine had come sweeping back upon him, he wished she, too, might be happy. He laid his

hand for an instant on hers where it gripped the chair-arm in a nervous tension.

"Cat," he said, "there are a lot of things I'd like to tell you. I believe I've learned 'em before you. Maybe you never'll learn 'em at all. But I'd like to tell you."

So intimate a suggestion drew her mind nearer him. She quieted her wish to whimper childishly, and listened. But Winterbourne could not at once speak. His mind went back over all he had read, all he had lived, and his approach to a solving of this terrible discontent the human creature has for another creature who, it assumes, might make it at home in these fastnesses of an alien world. Catherine was implying that because she had once loved him she could love him still; that because the index of spring had pointed to him as arbiter of the sunniest of hours, he had to be that now when the dial had changed. Vain hope! He was another man, she was another woman, not the younglings of that earlier time, and they had not lived together through those common tasks that bind human souls each to each. But all he was feeling he could only put into the inapposite statement, —

"Catherine, we're awfully fragmentary."

"I don't understand you," she said, listening hopefully, as if perhaps he meant to say some illuminating thing.

Winterbourne thought of the old simpler peoples. It seemed to him reasonable that a Greek might have had the vision of Diana in the thicket and been faithful unto the death that meant Olympus and the sight of the goddess face to face. But here in this modern day the face of things was broken up into little facets, and sometimes they reflect one light, sometimes another, until we tire of them and long for the russet peace of autumn days. But out of this bog he had to flounder if he was to get anywhere at all.

"Don't tell me I love folks," he said whimsically. "I just feel kindly toward 'em. That's all that's left in us when we're tending toward fifty."

"It ought not to be all that's left," she cried, with her old wildness of rebuttal. "Things ought to go on to be more and more."

"But they don't, child, they don't. You might as well say my eyes ought to be sharper and sharper — but they're not. I use glasses, and when I lose 'em I swear damnably because I can't see a page."

Catherine remembered a solemn word used a great deal in the lectures and reading she loved.

"You talk," she said, "as if the soul did n't exist."

"No, I don't. Be whipped if I do," said Winterbourne. He ran his eloquent fingers through his brush of curling hair. He was now defending what he believed in and what he did love. "But the soul looks through a great many windows here. It sees a good many colors. It's haunted by strange odors — the ships that come from far, Cat — the souls that sail in from other planets. They bring these things. The soul, she sits there and looks out; but what she sees she does n't want to possess, not if she's been looking out a good long time. Catherine, I am forty-six years old. I'm as gnarled as an apple tree. Don't you act as if I were a lilac in bloom. I'm not."

Most of this was misty enough to her, but she returned to the question in hand.

"I can't help it," she said. "You look at Bess as if she were another lilac-bush in bloom. You love to have her in the room with you. You turn to her for every single thing you want."

"Why, God bless me, of course I do!" said Winterbourne, in an extreme of irritation. "It's like having a bunch of roses

in the room. Besides, she understands me. I understand her. The girl's as immediate to me as my own hand."

Then he saw what he had done. Catherine got up, and stood a moment, her white face toward him. The eyes did not seem to reproach him, or to bid him mark their distended misery.

"Good-night," she said.

She seemed to melt away. Winterbourne sat there looking into the grate where the fire might have been. He was disgusted, all through, with his rash habit of speech, with a life that so classified as to leave the unclassified no chance to exist in decency.

"There's something," he said, "to spoil every damned thing."

He did not think he had sat there a long time, though he was not reading, when there was a little stir beside him. He looked up. Bess was there. When she got to her own room she had sat down by the window to coax back her peace of mind, because there was no great pleasure in praying when you had probably committed sin. And now here she was at his side, looking at him with kind eyes that always had a petition in them, the prayer that they might do something for him.

"I wanted to ask you, sir," she said, "if you think I've done wrong. I want to be —" she hesitated over the word, it meant so many strictures and hatefulnesses, and then brought it out with a gulp — "a lady."

There she stood, still holding him with those beseeching eyes. Winterbourne looked into them for a long moment. They seemed to him like wells of comfort where a man might wash himself of offence, if he were conscious of it. But there was no need of his bathing there, to come out clean. She was, as he had said in that hurried moment, as immediate to him as his own hand, but how sweeter than all the roses of

all the Junes, — a rose of heaven for him. He wanted to say a great many things to her, now that she had been thrown by his forced declaration into such communion with him. He wanted to ask her whether she, too, did not wish they were innocent, free creatures by some inland sea, uninhabited by these phantasms of an artificial world. But waking, he said to her gravely, —

“You are a lady, Bess.”

Her eyes interrogated him. She also had evidently a little explanation to make.

“I wish I could be — what she wants me to.”

This was either tribute to Catherine's ideals or an avowal of affection for her. Winterbourne was pretty sure it was not the last.

“Bess,” said he, “want to have a secret with me?”

Her face went all over a sweet bloom. She answered radiantly, —

“Yes, sir.”

“I'll tell you. When you do anything I don't think they'll like, I'll give you a hint of it.”

“Thank you, sir,” she answered fervently.

It seemed to Winterbourne that turn about would sweeten discipline.

“And when I'm cantankerous, you tell me.”

“You never are,” she assured him, in a voice the sweet flattery of which was its honesty. “You're just right.”

Winterbourne shook his head at her. That issue he could not stay to combat.

“And when I tell you or you tell me,” he continued, his smiling eyes full upon her, “you'll say it's because we've got a secret. Know what the secret's going to be, Bess?”

“No, sir.”

She longed to know. Her glowing look told him.

"The secret is," — he spoke with an impressiveness kept ordinarily for Tonty, — "the secret is that I'm going to take you for my daughter, and you're going to take me for your venerable daddy."

He was amazed at the effect on her. She seemed to be on tiptoe with delight.

"Shall I call you anything," she breathed, — "anything different?"

"No, simpleton, of course not. Don't I tell you it's a secret? Wouldn't that give it away? No — though sometimes if we were in a great prairie or a desert — Know where Sahara is, Bess?"

"Yes, sir," she answered dutifully. "It's in Africa."

"Well, if we were there, and there wasn't the leastest chance of anybody's hearing us, except it was an ostrich maybe, you could just whisper, 'Daddy,' and I'd whisper, 'What is it, kiddie?'"

Anything like the warm delight of her face he had not seen. It came upon him that two most blessed things had happened: Bess adored him "beyond beyond," and the little game had snatched her at one leap out of her lonesomeness.

"Is Celia —" she began.

He shook his head.

"No. I've got just one only kid. Celia must n't even know it. Good-night, kiddie."

He spoke the word in the merest whisper, a moving of the lips.

"Good-night," she said.

When she was at the door he waved a hand to her. His eyes felt hot. So slight a thing had changed her into the gay and glowing creature youth should be. Then he sat there a long time, not with his book but his inmost self. He had begun to wonder whether it had all got to begin again, the thing

he hated so he thought he had got rid of it — what he called responsibility. For he had known in his soul for a long time that when he said he was leaving the world that he might translate Theocritus, he had been leaving it because he thought the world and he might very well do without each other. But now the burdens — none of them tragic, but little parcels you might bring home from market — were piling on his back. There was no peace save in the upper sky, and there you could n't breathe.

XVII

BEFORE dawn Bess heard a tapping at her door. She thought she was in the tavern, called, while the kindness of sleep engulfed her, to speed some drummer on his way.

"In a minute," said she, while she set her feet, tranced like the rest of her, on the floor and put her hands to her shut eyes. But the knockings continued, at little nervous intervals; and they, the character of them and the look of her room, told her she was in this new phase of life where heaven alone knew what eccentric needs would summon her.

She went to the door, and there Catherine in her night-gown stood shuddering with recurrent spasms. Her face had a blank, draggled pallor as if she had scarcely slept, and her eyes were staring. The years, almost effaced by day when she called upon the framing of pretty gowns and exquisite toilet arts to help her, were here, straggling their marks all over her face, the pathetic map of life.

"I'm afraid," she said.

Bess for an instant stood looking at her, wondering whether to snatch her into her own warm bed; but that seemed a liberty toward a lady who was, to her humility, unapproachable. So she put an arm about her softly, yet with determination, and turned with her toward Catherine's chamber.

"It's early," she said. "You come back to bed."

"Don't wake Celia," Catherine whispered as they passed Celia's door. "Don't wake him."

When she was in her bed, and Bess had drawn up a

blanket to shield her from the cold of dawn, she lay with her eyes fixed solemnly on the girl and said again, —

“I'm afraid.”

“You lie still,” said Bess. “I'm going to get you something.”

Catherine's eyes seemed to beseech her not to go, but Bess, with her air of knowing what errands she had to do, had walked out of the room. Catherine heard her hastening down the stairs. In ten minutes, perhaps, she was back with a cup of hot milk, and Catherine shook her head on the pillow.

“I don't want that,” she said.

Bess only slipped an arm under her.

“You need something inside you,” she stated, and put the cup to her lips.

So Catherine drank, but as she lay back, she said again, as if unmoved in a conviction, —

“I'm afraid.”

Bess had run her arms into a wrapper, and now she sat down, the yellow folds of it falling beautifully about her.

“Are n't you surprised?” Catherine interrogated her. “Did you ever see a grown-up woman afraid?”

“Yes,” said Bess, beginning to plait the curling ends of her brown braid. “You go to sleep now, and I'll sit here. When you wake up, you won't be afraid.”

“Yes, I shall,” said Catherine. “I haven't slept all night. Why should you think I can sleep now?”

“Did you say your prayers?” asked Bess, with simplicity.

The unheard-of challenge startled Catherine out of her panic, to pure wonder.

“What makes you ask that?” she queried.

“I thought maybe you'd better say 'em now,” said Bess with the same air of referring the matter to an ordinary remedy. “That's all.”

"Do you say your prayers?" Catherine countered.

"Yes."

"I did n't know you were a churchwoman." Human curiosity and hot milk were working a momentary wholesome change in her.

"I don't go to meeting very often," said Bess. "I don't care much about it."

"Then what prayers do you say?"

"I say 'Now I lay me.' That's all I know."

Catherine simply stared at her. But Bess had put her head back against the grandfather chair and closed her eyes. The lashes were very thick and long. Perhaps her broken lethargy was returning upon her; it might be she was willing to lull Catherine by a good example. Catherine watched her for a while in a jealous questioning. She could not help wondering how it would seem to have such a velvet surface and such curves of the upper lip. How would it feel to be so singularly endowed that John Winterbourne could say, "She is as immediate to me as my own hand"? Yet it had to be accepted that Bess was, in the nature of her, essential to her also, in her need. She had a pained sense of the girl's triumphing youth and some peculiar quality that made her at one with life. It hurt her inconceivably to see her husband turning, though so unconsciously and with such honest clarity, to that wholesome serviceableness; yet it had bred in her no rancor against Bess. And here, in her own extremity, she also was seeking her, because Bess mysteriously had help and would give it.

With the light and perhaps the consciousness of scrutiny, Bess awoke and seemed to gather in the situation anew. Then she smiled down at Catherine slightly but most naturally, as if difficulties gave her an especial pleasure.

"You lie still," she said. "I'm going to dress me, and then I'll bring your breakfast."

"No," said Catherine perversely, the idea of requiring extraordinary service suddenly, now it was stated, repugnant to her. "Send Lyddy." But this was knowing Lyddy would not come.

"You lie still," said Bess again. "I'm going to dress me."

A little later, for she was always to the fore with breakfast, lest Lyddy had foundered by the way, and this morning there was no time for dallying and choosing among crisp prettinesses, she was in the kitchen, and Lyddy, loosely drifting back and forth on her efficient errands between table and stove, turned to look with sardonic disapproval at the little tray she was making comely.

"Cat's foot!" said Lyddy. "Who's got the pip? You better by half set down here an' eat your own breakfast. Fever de lurks, that's what's up chamber — two stomachs to eat an' nary one to work."

But Bess was absorbed. She need n't answer, because Lyddy was now hers without conciliation. She carried up the tray and packed Catherine about with pillows, so engrossed in swift efficiency that there was no use in checking her. She caused the breakfast to be eaten, and then put the patient back again into her nest and adjured her with authority to stay there until she should come again. Then, having carried down the tray and eaten her own breakfast, she looked about for Winterbourne and spied him in the back garden, where he was surveying the world with the air of one who meant presently to do something in it.

Winterbourne had had his morning smoke, which was not actually the same as his after-breakfast one; and because the earth looked kindly to him, he was about to take out his pipe to add one zest more. To him appeared Bess, bareheaded, and comely as the morning. She seemed to furnish another

reason. But her first address stopped his hand midway in the quest for his tobacco-pouch.

"Your wife's broken down," said she briefly.

He stared at her, and she repeated it.

"Broken down?" Winterbourne questioned. "Don't talk as if she was a shay."

That was Greek to her, and again she made her statement, unaltered.

"How do you know?" Winterbourne inquired. "Did she tell you?"

"No, sir, but I've seen her and she says she's afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know, sir. But she is, and that's the way they are sometimes."

"Why, you preternaturally wise young simpleton, you babe and suckling," he interrogated her, yet struck so palpably by her solemn assertiveness that he tucked the pouch back into his pocket and kept only the pipe for company, "where did you learn to be a medical man? Was Hippocrates your uncle? How's old Galen?"

"I don't know them, sir," said Bess, more rapidly and still cogently because she thought Catherine might be wanting her. "But I've seen a good many ladies just like this. They break down, ladies do."

"Where did you see 'em, Hop-o'-my-Thumb?"

"One season I worked in the sanatorium, the year there was the fire in the tavern and we had to shut down. They came to get ozone." She spoke as if it might be something from the bargain-counter.

"What's ozone?" Winterbourne asked, his eyes all points of fun and the crinkles about them interlacing.

"I don't know, sir, but they said it was there and the ladies came to get it."

"Did you like being there, you trumpery barmaid, mixing your ozone and serving it out by the glass?"

"Not very well. But what I was going to say —"

"Why did n't you like it?"

She answered now to the point, seeing there was no switching him off until that issue was put by.

"There was a good deal of complaint. They were pretty nervous. And they wanted to give you fees."

"Wanted to give me fees?"

"Me, sir. When I did things for 'em."

"Did you like that, Bess?"

The brown eyes opened on him in a mild surprise.

"Why, I did n't take 'em, sir. I had my regular wages."

Winterbourne slapped his leg and crowed.

"Athena, listen to her!" he adjured the upper air. "She's your own girl. Why did n't you take 'em?"

She was getting impatient now, her errand all undone.

"Why, sir, I told you. I had my regular wages. But what I was going to say, if you send for the doctor, he'll tell her she's got to lie still maybe for a year."

So vividly was last night present to Winterbourne's consciousness that he might have been forgiven if his mind, that errant servitor, suggested, in a burst of reckless comment, that it did not in the least shrink from such a prospect. But what he said was, —

"Good God!"

"So I thought if maybe you'd just encourage her to lie abed mornings and then get up and kind of take her mind off herself — why, that would be the best. There's no need of their lying abed a year, sir. It does 'em harm in the end."

She looked so earnest with her calm eyes fixed upon him in the convincingness of her part, so sweet all through with her hair blowing about her pretty face, that, in spite of the

mysterious ill-fortune that had befallen his wife, Winterbourne could have burst out into great laughter. Bess always affected him so, in a differing ratio. Sometimes he wanted to laugh at her, she was so queer, sometimes tenderly, she was such a little fool. But she always challenged mirth.

"I'm going in now," she said. "You encourage her."

"Where's Celia? Has she got cracked or frayed or broken since I saw her yesterday?"

"She's sleeping late. There's Tonty, Mr. Winterbourne. I guess she's looking for you."

Tonty was coming wandering out at the back door by which Lyddy had sent her to find Jackie. She looked like a little girl out of a good book, with the long hair she had painstakingly curled in the habit of an older time, — because mother's hair in the picture was curled just so, — and a large hat in her hand. Her dear little face, with its pointed chin, had its usual gravity, and it was apparent she had come to deliver a message.

"Jackie," she said.

"What say, Dame Partlet?" Winterbourne responded, making her a bow. That she liked. He did it so gravely there was no derision in it.

"Mother said I was to tell you she had broken down."

Winterbourne looked at Bess. There was terror in his glance.

"Is this a world-wide calamity?" he inquired of her. "Are ladies falling in fragments about us?"

Bess was paying no attention to him. This was her province. He was the helpless male.

"Where is mother?" she asked Tonty confidentially.

"In bed with a lot of papers. She's broken down."

"It's no use, Bess," said Winterbourne. "It's no manner of use. I shall be daffy if I hear any more of these things."

You take Tonty in and give her some lemon-pie or something, and I'll go clamming."

Tonty brightened at the reference to lemon-pie, but Bess had taken her hand.

"I'll go back with her," she said. "Come, Tonty. I'm going to see mother."

That struck Tonty as being unnecessary, apparently, until she had the lemon-pie, and she looked back, wistful and remindingly at Jackie who had prescribed it. He watched them away, but when they were outside the gate he followed with a couple of strides.

"Did n't mother say anything more, Tonty?" he besought.

"No. She said I was to tell you she'd broken down."

Winterbourne stood there in the road and watched them away. He knew he ought to go in and see Catherine, — the shards of her, at least, — but he was afraid to. And why — why — his dazed intelligence asked him, if Anna Clayton Ramsay had flown into a million pieces did she send the news of it to him like the message of ill to Cleopatra?

"It's my damned good-nature," he grumbled.

Then he thought for a moment of the duties of life and how, wearisome as they were, he meant to tackle them, and at the same minute saw Dwight Hunter in his ample cart driving off for sea-weed.

"Hi!" said Winterbourne.

Hunter stopped, and Winterbourne mounted beside him and drove off into the shining day, as care-free as a boy going swimming against orders. But he did not drive so irretrievably far that conscience was drugged indeed. In the midst of a pæan from Dwight about the old furniture that went for a song down the valley yesterday, he heaved a sigh.

"Draw up, Dwight," he bade him. "I've got to get out."

"Forgot something?" asked Hunter, doing it.

"Yes. Forgot my manners, forgot my decency. Good-by, old man."

Then Dwight drove on, and Winterbourne betook himself, muttering, along the road to Mrs. Ramsay's.

Tonty could not be persuaded to talk when she and Bess set forth, and so Bess gave up the task of setting her at ease, and they went on together in the silence that is sometimes ease itself. Tonty's little heart instantly felt lighter. She found it quite difficult to converse except with Jackie, and it seemed to her a beautiful lady who went along humming and showed no interest in her going to school or her taste in kittens. At the front door three other little figures were in line to meet them, — Tony with a tier buttoned, in defiance of its nature, in front, — this because, in the family troubles of the morning, he had manfully dressed himself. Tonty noted that badge of haste and waved a hand to him, a signal to hide himself behind the more properly apparelled; but Tony stood still with his hand on the hoe-handle which was this morning his comforter, and Bess with her little guide passed them and went on to Mrs. Ramsay's room.

It was a big room in the front of the house, with dark furniture of the wrong period, of a large uncouthness and much be-knobbed. The great bed had been slept in, and the circular untidy nest of its occupant showed that she had not gone through the rite of opening it to the air. Bess, seeing this lair of the escaped lady, was about to ask Tonty where they should look for her next, when there on a sofa, the floor under it stuffed with papers, her bonnet on and unhappily askew, they saw her. One glove even was on. Her bag, disgorging papers, was at her side slumped under one arm.

Bess on the way to her had time to feel that the room was a chaos of papers and that it ought to be cleared out.

There were papers on the table, a package on the washstand even between bowl and pitcher, and a ragged-edged pile of them along one wall, these yellowed from long life, the folds brown with dust. Bess, who had done a great deal of cleaning in her short day, could have told you what a sneezy job it would have been to reorganize that treasured litter. It was almost possible to wonder how one could have slept in the room on a breezy night with the window open, for the rustling of so much disengaged matter of leaves. When Bess stood at her side, Mrs. Ramsay opened her eyes.

"Go away, Tonty," she said distinctly, and Tonty, with a fear upon her, went. "There's no reason why the child should be frightened," Mrs. Ramsay continued, shutting her eyes again after a recognizing look at Bess. "Fear is the one tyrant."

Bess, with an instinct that she must look too tall for kindness to the prostrate figure on the sofa, drew up a chair, itself the repository of papers, and placed herself on the edge of it, not invading their sovereignty.

"I sent for Mr. Winterbourne," said Mrs. Ramsay. She spoke with a deliberate care that evidently cost her a good deal. "I wanted to tell him my son — I can't remember his name —"

"Tim?"

"I think so. My son has gone to the city this morning with — I can't remember the name."

"With his father?"

"With something that belongs to Mr. Winterbourne. I can remember Mr. Winterbourne's name. Why can't I remember the names I can't remember?"

"You'd better stop trying. You'd better go to sleep," said Bess, snatching for a comparison, out of her serviceable memory of the lady at the sanatorium who could n't find the

names of things she wanted, and was forced to decline upon makeshifts until she had become sufficiently heartened on ozone to begin words over again.

But Mrs. Ramsay was paying no attention to hygienic promptings.

"The thing my son has carried is very important to Mr. Winterbourne —" she asserted. "What do you think it could be?"

"If it's anything he's borrowed," Bess ventured at random, "he'll return it all right."

"No, it's not that. He has n't borrowed it. He has —" Her brows contracted over the memory of some past shock or trouble. "What do you think it could be? A nutmeg-grater? Is that it? Is it black-silk mitts? Does that sound right to you?"

Bess, in time of sick minds, could invent gloriously and swear to the invention of anybody else.

"Either of 'em would do," she assured Mrs. Ramsay. "You shut your eyes now. I'll tell him."

"Tell him something must be done," Mrs. Ramsay adjured her. "If he does n't look out, the circingle will be sold." And then she did shut her eyes, and Bess might have thought she was resting except for her knitted brows and the moving of her mouth.

Bess got softly out of her chair, and Mrs. Ramsay opened her eyes at the rustle, and said clearly, —

"There's one thing more. I want to tell you why I am sure I've broken down. You don't notice it, of course, but I can't remember. When I try to remember a word, it looks like an ink-eraser — the kind with the band round the middle."

"I'll get you a glass of water," said Bess.

She went downstairs to the kitchen, where the little maid,

like one impelled upon a mission imperfectly understood but acquiesced in, was washing dishes with the air of having done it ever since Bess had seen her last. No, she did n't know anything about Mrs. Ramsay's not feeling well. Mrs. Ramsay'd had her breakfast with her bonnet on, same as she always did, to take the eight-thirteen. She did n't see her go out, but then she was busy washing the dishes. No, she guessed Mary was n't coming back to cook. Mary'd had a dreadful time with her liver and her tubes going on a year now. She said she'd have left long ago if it had n't been for the children. So Bess went back home with her budget of news, and met Winterbourne by the way.

"Well?" said he, standing still under the big ash tree while she also paused. "Well, Atlas, what do you make of it?"

The name puzzled her, — why should she be called a school book? — but she could n't stop for that.

"It's true what Tonty said," she told him, with unmoved directness. "Her mother's broken down."

Winterbourne stood looking at her for a full minute while she met his gaze as squarely, her own only seeming to ask him if he wanted to know anything more.

"Bess," said he, "have you by accident a sense of humor about you?"

"What, sir?"

"Could you roll on the ground and scream, if you were n't afraid of mussing your frock, because this old world's so funny? Or does it seem to you a perfectly natural and simple thing for two ladies in one morning to announce that they've broken down? Speak up, Oracle. I've got to know."

"I suppose they might as well break down the same morning as different mornings," said Bess practically. "It's just something that happens to you, same as a cold would

be. Lots of folks have colds the same day. Mr. Winterbourne, do you think the Ramsays have any money?"

"I think they're poor as barley soup. I think Ramsay'll blow the top of his head off some day, if he ever sits down to consider how he's going to provide for his children and his wife and his old waterlogged craft."

"Then, Mr. Winterbourne," said Bess, with a resolution she had evidently no least thought of his gainsaying, "we've got to take Mrs. Ramsay over to your house for a month or so, till we see how it's going to turn."

"Take Anna Clayton Ramsay into my house?" he pelted at her. "You young basilisk, do you know what you're saying?"

"It's all the way I see," she remarked, also, it was evident, sending her mind skirmishing about to guess whether there might not indeed prove to be expedients that pleased him better. "Then that little Harriet could take some care of the children, and I could take care of Mrs. Ramsay and your wife, same time."

"My father Jupiter!" Winterbourne broke out. He took off his hat and looked up into the clear sky. "Artemis, do you hear? Cytherea, here is a maiden that ought to belong to you alone—do you hear, you trumpery old second-hand lot of Olympians? What you going to do about it?"

Bess was looking at him in concern. His suffused forehead, the veins starting out on it in picturesque meandering, the light in his bright eyes—these seemed to her like a disproportionate madness.

"Don't you feel well, sir?" she inquired. "Why don't you put your hat on? It's a warm day."

Winterbourne stared at her for an instant of entire joy in one so impervious to Fortune's ironies. He broke into a great laugh and did replace his hat.

"Bess," said he, "I would rather couch with the Ne-mean lion, I would crawl into the mouth of the horny crocodile and read my Homer there, rather than admit Anna Clayton Ramsay to my hearthstone. Nay, girl! but stay. You said she had lost her memory of words."

"Yes, Mr. Winterbourne. Come, let's be moving on home."

"Then do as you like, you wilful jade. If she's dumb, that's all I ask of her. You shall have her to wait upon and use up your own youth on. Have your way, Mad Hatter. Have your way."

But Bess, walking faster and faster toward home, did give a thought in the pauses of planning how Mrs. Ramsay could have the chintz chamber, to Winterbourne's own surprise when he found out, in the course of days, that ladies' breaking-down was not so ironic an affair as might be supposed. But she was too busy a young woman to worry about contingencies before they came. The corner of her mouth, the one Winterbourne could see, was smiling delightfully. She had seen Celia waiting for them by the gate, Celia in a blue gown, looking like the morn itself. Bess called to her, her name with a boyish "Hullo!" and Winterbourne, hearing the tone that at once enriched her voice, wondered how she could be so animated over a tended piece of garden prettiness. His own tastes ran all to wildings, that, having to court no favor of wind and sun, are the more robust.

"Where've you been, you two?" Celia asked.

She came in between them and tucked an arm in theirs. "I overslept. Mother did, too. Lyddy said them that wanted coffee could make it." She laughed at that, as if her young vitality needed no support from coffee or anything else.

"Have you had it?" Bess asked her, ready, Winterbourne

knew, to brew it instantly or boil her a roc's egg if an atom of it might please her appetite.

"No, I don't want it. I've had some bread and milk. But where've you been, you two?"

Here Winterbourne broke away from the affectionate clasp, and with the certainty very strong within him that he could n't bear the recital of any more of woman's woes, went round to the side door whence he could escape to the arbor and his smoke.

"Sit down here a minute," said Bess. "I want to tell you about it."

They sat down together on the stone step, both radiant in the beauty of youth, but one with the air of the creature born to luxury and the other all willing servitude. Even their hands were different. Celia thought that as she took up her sister's brown paw in her own fragile one; she choked a little thinking what that meant, so many years lost to song. And to what end? But wonder crowded out these accustomed thoughts of hers, for Bess was telling in a few terse sentences what had happened and what she meant to do. Celia could not exclaim her amazement sufficiently.

"Take her here!" she kept repeating. "Take her here! What can you do with her?"

"She's got to have quiet," said Bess. "She's got to be fed, too. I don't believe she's had very much to eat, late years. She's been too drove."

The word hit Celia in the centre of her fastidiousness, as a phrase from Bess was likely to do now and then. Her brows contracted.

"But you say she's ill, too?" she inquired, her mind at liberty to jump back to Catherine. "Why don't we have the doctor?"

Then Bess explained, as she had to Winterbourne, that

these things were simple as any other task of the day and doctors only complicated them. They were so careful, they made you think the matter was more serious than it was. All the broken-down needed was food and courage, a plenty. They got up from the step and, turning to go in together, Celia still absently kept her sister's hand.

"Well, Bess," she said. The tone was bitter and Bess looked at her. "Well, Bess, it's all coming out of you."

The answer that it needn't all come out of her did not present itself to Bess. She only said the thing that did come to her and appeared to cover everything.

"I can do it as well as not. I don't mind such things."

Celia turned upon her in a loving rage.

"You don't seem to see what it means," she fumed, her voice suppressed to the proximity of Catherine's window overhead. "If you're doing all these things, you can't sing. The days are going and you never will."

"Sing?" repeated Bess, dazed for an instant, and then rising to the assault of the word that was always pelting her. "Oh, I can sing fast enough. There's no trouble about that."

"I wish I had it," Celia raged. "I wish I had the voice. You'd see where I'd be. You'd see where I'd put us both."

Bess was looking at her in a simple wonder. If Celia needed things, she thought as she had before, why then she must get them for her. She might even go through the nightmare of standing up in heated rooms and singing for that.

"What you want, dear?" she asked, like a mother. "What is it you want?"

"I want money," Celia said, in a voice as hard as any metal ever coined. "Then I'd put us both where we ought to be. Come, let's go up and see her."

XVIII

MRS. RAMSAY, not having taken off her bonnet or removed the glove from her mismated hand, was put into a carriage, and Winterbourne, at the top notch of amazement, watched her being borne into his house and up his stairs. Then Bess shut the door upon her, and the void received her. It was Winterbourne's pleasing task, handed him by Bess in her way of seeing the immediate issue and no reason why it should not be met, to find Ramsay after he came home from the city that late evening, and tell him his shattered wife had been spirited away from him to hygienic influences. Winterbourne undertook the errand in a mood of waxing indignation over making himself an agent in such a coil. Where was Theocritus? Where were the long hours with Lovell in a kindred recognition that the world could be made to stand still while one turned the printed page? Contesting that on the way home, after his mission had been warily accomplished, he met Lovell himself, and mentally collared him, in the sudden relief that here was somebody who would listen to language that need not be diluted.

"I've seen Ramsay," said Winterbourne, as if that covered the enormous area of his wrongs.

Lovell had been pelting along in the summer night, after an attempted call at Winterbourne's, where Celia, meeting him at the door, had told him they had two invalids in the house, and yet had given him a kind quarter of an hour in the beguiling dusk, where, in her white gown, she looked to him like the angels he had been forgetting of late years—personified virtues, embodied mysticisms and beauties.

"I hear his wife's with you," he responded. "What's Ramsay say?"

"Say? Jim, do you know how Ramsay looks?"

"Why, yes, of course I do. I've seen Ramsay."

"He looks like pyjamas of a Monday hanging on the line. He's a sketch of a man. He is n't even washed in. He's as neutral as macaroni."

"Well," said Lovell. He had turned to walk along with Winterbourne, the clever suggestion of impulse being that, if he got legitimately back to the Winterbourne gate, Celia might be standing there yet. "What would you?" he continued with a laugh. "Ramsay's not a Viking. Who wants him to be?"

"I had a kind of a hope that Ramsay was a gay buccaneer. They said he didn't even come home Sundays. I thought he was whooping it up in town."

"Didn't you know why Ramsay doesn't come home Sundays? I could have told you that. He works like the mischief all the week. He's crowded all the time by that firm of his; but he does n't dare to yip because he can't afford to lose his job and there's nothing left in him now to get another. And Sundays he goes to a cheap hotel in town, and sleeps till Monday."

"Can't he sleep at home?"

"No. There's the children. And his wife reading essays to him."

"The children! They might play backgammon on my shirt-front and I could sleep."

"Well, Ramsay can't. They're his children. If they were yours, maybe you could n't, either."

"My Father Jupiter," groaned Winterbourne, taking off his hat and looking up incidentally at Orion. "Mother Sky and Brother Trees, we're all mad together! Well, I've got

Anna Clayton Ramsay at my house, and I'm a broken man."

"Say, Winterbourne," Lovell rushed in with the haste of one who has n't recognized rights to interfere, "what's going to come of all this? Your wife is sick, and now you've adopted Anna Clayton Ramsay. Lyddy never'll stir her stumps in this philanthropy. Your girls are going to break down themselves. It's all coming on them."

"On whom?" Winterbourne inquired, frowning at the night.

"Oh, Celia — and her sister."

"Don't you worry," said Winterbourne sardonically, "nothing's coming on Celia."

"No," said Lovell, with innocence. "We must prevent it if we can. I don't believe Bess would let it. She knows how delicate Celia is."

Winterbourne burst into a laugh.

"There's one of those young women, my son," said he, "that is worthy of a special and particular part—a statue, pure gold, of Artemis in a shrine of leaves. I'd like to see her there."

"Yes," said Lovell, his heart responding.

All the poetic desires of his youth came flooding back upon him. It seemed to him that fancies were beating softly about in the night-air, their wings too close. They kept him from breathing almost, the soft warmth and fragrance of them and the answering choke in his throat. And this, he thought, was nothing in him. It was one girl, and because she was what she was.

"Winterbourne," he said.

This was a voice Winterbourne had not heard from him. Lovell always seemed to him as cool as a frosty morning.

"Winterbourne, she's the only one for me."

The tone told it all, so eloquently that Winterbourne felt it like a blow. It brought an assault upon his own breath, and for an instant he halted and lost a step.

"Jim," said he, "is Clyde a desert island? Were n't there any girls here before these two came?"

"Not like her."

"Well, it's all right if you can get her, but somehow I never thought of her going the old way."

"What do you mean by the old way?" Lovell demanded, in the fierce revulsion from his shyness.

"Oh, you know — wedding rings, all the rest of it. I sort of hoped she'd be Diana in the brake. I knew the earth would take care of her. The earth's her mother."

The poetic form of it fitted in with Lovell's mood. To him, too, Celia was Diana, mysterious, untouched. He had no hope, in the humility of this first vision, ever to find the inner heart of her, but he had many knightly feelings about being her servitor.

"I know it," he said soberly. "I did n't suppose you'd hit her off at once; somehow I thought I was the only one to know her."

Winterbourne put his hand up through his hair and seemed to sweep away the gigantic dreams of night.

"It's easy to be a fool in the dark," he said. "All the infernal old curiosities that come out with light are in abeyance. Well, we think alike about her, if that's any comfort to you. Look at the two girls. Look at the difference in 'em. Should n't you say one grew up out of the earth in the deep woods and the other was made in a candy-factory?"

"No," said Lovell, with innocence. "Bess does n't suggest the candy-factory. But Celia is all that. She grew up out of the earth and bloomed. She is a lily in a garden of spice."

Again Winterbourne stopped, the surprise of it now the assault upon his heart.

"Celia!" he muttered, himself in a supreme amaze. "In the name of the prophet, Celia!"

"What is it?" Lovell asked briefly, coming out of his own particular musing.

But Winterbourne laughed a big laugh with joy in it. The thicket was unbroken. His maid hid there, unsuspected even. But Lovell was too good a fellow to start unwarned on his pilgrimage toward Celia.

"Tell you what, Jim," said Winterbourne.

"Well."

Winterbourne stopped to laugh again.

"If you should marry Celia," — he heard Lovell's quick responsive breath, — "take my advice. Early, very early, let her see you're master. Dress her in hodden gray, whatever that is, and set her to weeding the onions. Knock the nonsense out of her, if you have to jam her head against the wall to do it. That's the last word of a doting father."

They were at the gate, and Winterbourne, chuckling, thought the dark might well be illuminated by the probable flash in Lovell's eyes.

"Night, Jim," said he. "Think it over."

"Winterbourne," Lovell's voice came crisply after him up the path. "Winterbourne!"

He stopped, returned a step, genial with the delight that overtook him on finding humanity shocked into candor. But Lovell had but one scornful word to say: —

"Winterbourne, you're drunk."

"Ain't either," said Winterbourne. "I'm never drunk unless it's with hexameters. I took the privilege of a doting father, and you don't like it. Night, Jim."

According to his custom then, when there were compli-

cations to interfere with a quiet smoke, Winterbourne took his way to the arbor; but after his pipe was ready and the lighted match lifted, he forbore. The smell would tell them where he was. Celia would come down to pester him with soft attentions, Anna Clayton Ramsay might even send for him to hear the draft of a new speech — for he had no faith in such energy failing. A sun might as likely break and bestrew the void before its course was finished. Anna Clayton Ramsay was probably at that moment mounting a table or a bureau for a rostrum and holding forth. So he walked softly into the night and had his smoke, a part of it under the old willow tree by Sutton River, where there was a convenient log, and the stillness made it seem as if no human thing had come there or would come. Once there was a hurried step. He thought it was Dwight Hunter on the road, and took his pipe out of his mouth to listen and perhaps to call. But the figure went by, and Winterbourne said nothing, because solitude was blessed to him. When he was alone on nights like these, he seemed able to put a hand out and touch the great web of things as a whole, and find how unbroken it is in spite of the tangle of the threads we weave by day. He had taken large and solemn joy of these later years when he was outside the actual circle of things, in musing over the indestructibility of the web and the marvellous pattern of it. None of that happy contemplative acquiescence had been possible to him while he was in the grip of his emotions, bound upon the wheel of things, but in fleeing bonds he thought he had escaped what had brought him ill. At least they had sealed his eyes so that he had not yet been able to take in this vision of the whole. He had hoped, in an undefined fashion, that Lovell, too, meant to escape the tyranny of things, to read his book and fall into the calm ecstasy of watching the sunset come and

go. But Lovell was still young. He must break paths for himself, even if they led to market. But Winterbourne, though his house just now was a carnival of action, knew that all his own paths would lead into the green wood of tranquillity. In the green wood was Bess, also. He hoped he could keep her there in a little leafy shrine.

When he went homeward, it was in great peace. The hour was late, and he meant to slip with all possible softness up to his own room. There was a light in the kitchen and a figure moving there. But as he watched the strangeness of it, a hand pulled down one curtain and then the other. Winterbourne went up the path to the side door. Some one was stirring in the kitchen. There was a soft familiar sound,—a broom on the floor,—Bess, he supposed, sweeping away her prettiness. He swore at the shame of it, opened the door and went in, a mandate on his lips concerning bed. The figure turned to meet him. It had a dust-pan in its hand, and shame was on its face. It was Dwight Hunter. Winterbourne, in the surprise of it, did not even refer it to Jupiter, as he was in the way of doing. He dropped into Lyddy's own chair by the window.

"Well, my son," said he, "what next?"

Hunter, having seen who it was, and that old Winterbourne was n't to be eluded like the petticoats before whom he had feared he might have to justify himself, took up the dust very deftly and looked about him with an anxious eye, to see what had escaped him. The kitchen was a marvel of tidiness. Winterbourne, now his attention was called to it, could see that. One point only seemed to afford Hunter a perfect gratification, that because it mirrored an unusual deed perfectly accomplished.

"Cast your eye over that stove," said he. "At first I

could n't find the blacking. Look at it shine." Then he grinned.

"Hunter," said Winterbourne judicially, "are you bringing the treasured lore of young manhood into my kitchen as a trophy to lay at Celia's feet?"

"Celia be hanged," said Hunter, returning the broom to its nail and looking about him with a concentrated energy.

"Her stock is very well up, I'd have you know," Winterbourne assured him. "I've been getting quotations. Oh, you'd better not sniff at Celia."

Hunter was paying no attention at all.

"Lyddy's gone to bed," said he, "cantankerous as an old witch. She says she's got sciatica, and there were folks enough in the house before. The devil's in her, that's all. You bear too much from that old cormorant."

"Are you laying the pride of your young manhood at Lyddy's feet then?" Winterbourne inquired pleasantly, yet resolved to push it.

"Oh, come, hush up!" Hunter flushed a little. "She went upstairs and left the kitchen on its head. She won't stir her old stumps to get breakfast. You see if she does. And somebody else'll have to do it, and it's a mighty discouraging thing to find the kitchen upside down."

He sounded quarrelsome.

"So it is, Hercules, so it is. Celia is going to find it right-side up when she comes in to make the morning coffee."

"Celia be blowed, I tell you!"

"Young man, Celia is my daughter."

"No, she isn't either. You don't care a straw about her."

"Then it's evident you haven't done it to please me." Winterbourne seemed to be musing.

"I'm not pleasing you to any great extent nowadays," said Hunter. He looked angry enough and willing to show

it. "I don't seem to care about the way things are going on here. If you had the spirit of a rabbit, you'd get a good girl into this house —"

"And have Lyddy hang herself to the bed-post by her garters?"

"Lyddy! I'm sick of Lyddy. What business have you got anyway, taking a girl into your house and then working her to death to make things go as that old beldame wants 'em to? You've got to make a change and do it quick, or something's going to happen."

Winterbourne liked him very much in his red-hot anger, his brown hands gripping the chair-back he had been putting straight, and his jaw set firm. Hunter was "mad," as school-boys had seen him years ago, and as he had n't found occasion to be since, he had dominated the world so simply and it had so obeyed him. But Winterbourne was n't going to give in. After all, it was his kitchen and Bess was his chosen kid. He got up from the chair, and yawned a little.

"All right, Hunter," he agreed. "I've got to go to bed. So've you. There's another day coming."

"I mean it," Dwight assured him. "A man's laziness can go too far."

Winterbourne had opened the door and stood looking out. But there was something in the air that made it likely he expected Dwight to go, and the youth blunderingly did, feeling righteous but somehow crude and foolish. Yet he was awake to the injustice of it all. A man like Winterbourne, as clever as he, he thought, could make you feel young by just standing by and laughing. But he had no business to. He'd better get a capable girl into the kitchen and stop talking about Jupiter and Theocritus. Dwight had loved the talk about Theocritus until it became apparent that Bess was being lashed too hard. That sent Theocritus up in smoke.

"Dwight," Winterbourne called him.

"Well," said Dwight, pausing in the path.

"You're certain you don't consider Celia a lily in a garden of spice?"

To this Dwight had no answer. The quizzical twist in the tone of it sent him swinging on his heel and down the path.

"Well," said Winterbourne to the stars, "it's evident I've got no friends."

He went to bed, laughing softly and not entirely with mirth. But the next morning it was at last decreed that he should see his wife. He went in on a lumbering tiptoe, trying to get used to the queerness of it—a woman in health over night and then in a state of fragility where you mustn't excite her, mustn't even gainsay her, as he understood. She lay in her bed, very pretty and young, with the lines smoothed out of her face, wistfully charming, but evidently entirely acquiescent in her task of not getting up. Winterbourne felt an instant pity of her. It swallowed up the impish wonder he had felt over the situation while it was imperfectly understood.

"Well, young lady," said he, standing by the bedside. "Want me to read to you?"

She made the slightest motion of her head on the pillow. It was negation accomplished with the smallest amount of energy. Immediately Winterbourne felt that, contrary to her usual faithful habit, she did not wish him to stay. She expected him to go.

"Bess wants me to say my prayers," she informed him, in a tone of wonder.

"Well," said Winterbourne, covering the issue as well as he could, in the dark as he was over the theological aspect of it, "it wouldn't do most of us any harm."

"She says I must do it when I'm afraid."

"Oh, come, Cat, you're not afraid. You've got that up to scare the rest of us."

"I am," she insisted. "I *feel* afraid."

"Want me to go now?" he asked, answering something in her eyes.

She nodded, and he went. On the stairs he met Bess in afternoon trim, calm as a lake without a ripple. She seemed to him the only relieving incident in a world of tedium and madness. He stopped on the landing to let her pass.

"Bess," said he, in spite of himself offering her his personal pocket of complaint, "the times are most infernally out of joint."

"I'm glad you didn't stay," said Bess, intent as ever upon the direct issue. "I'm going to tell her about Mrs. Ramsay."

"Doesn't she know that woman's here?"

"No. I guess I'd better tell her. Mrs. Ramsay keeps sending her messages, only she can't remember the word, and I get all mixed up."

"Bess, doesn't it seem to you as if this house was a particular bedlam broke loose?"

She was meeting his frowning gaze with her calm scrutiny.

"Why, no," she said, unmoved. "It seems to me about as everything is all the time."

"Does there seem to you anything unusual in the fact that you're working night and day to keep this old scow afloat?"

"No," said Bess, apparently thinking it over as something deserving consideration though it had not occurred to her before. "'Most everybody's got all they can do everywhere all the time."

This seemed to cover the matter, but he had one word more for her—this left from the blows Hunter had dealt him. That arrow had hit, and the place was stinging yet.

"You're going to have a maid, Bess. You're not going to be Cinderella any longer."

"A maid? What for?"

"To keep you from breaking your back over this infernal house."

"Well, I guess I'm not," said Bess with promptitude. "Where'd Lyddy be? You can get all the girls you want to, but they won't come into Lyddy's kitchen if I can help it. There!"

It was the first sign of intemperate heat he had seen in her. It quite touched her up to something imperfect and human, and he liked it. She went on to her task, and he to his pipe downstairs and his reflections on the changing pageant of the world.

XIX

C ELIA wanted a garden of life, pretty posy-beds to bloom and wave their ribbons and banners, all the world meantime saying, "How fine your garden is! How much better than other gardens, and how clever you were to make it!" But she had crude ways of arriving. Some even tawdry-minded girl born with an easy recognition of men and spoils could have taught her many things: yet those are the clevernesses that come by nature, and really no teaching ever avails. She was no sportsman. She never trod delicately enough, and even having winged the bird, she was apt to pounce too quickly, and holding him for one moment in her impetuous hands, start back frightened at the ebbing warm life of him, the blood she had drawn, and drop him, herself to run away into deeper coverts.

There is one endowment of woman that comes by grace and not by learning, — the power to manage a man, and it is distributed with as much eccentricity as the glory of the singing voice, or the instinct of seeing a sunset as it will look in paint. Is not music a gift, heaven-descended? So is innate coquetry, and as capriciously given. The daughter of all the Cæsars may go earless and croaking, and some slave sprung out of ignominy may carry divinest airs to the heaven that gave them birth or coax them out of wood and string. There is no reason in this save the unexplained reasons of Nature, who brazenly shows her hand, though no one is game enough to play against her. Cleopatra is as likely to be born one of a hovel as in gilded wedlock.

There are unwashed, uncombed maidens enough in the

world who with the unconsciousness of instinct can lead men by a silken leash ; but Celia was not of them, and would not, by instinct, have wished to be. She had all the virginal withdrawals, panics, even, that made her sister so austere. If she could have been a princess, unapproached save for obeisances, that would have pleased her mightily, and she would have kept her throne inviolate. Prince consorts were not for her. But here she was in the wrong place, colored by ideals that kept her smarting. The world, she conceived through Catherine's teaching, was an assemblage of competitive ranks where it is necessary to seem wonderful. In a subordinate place, she was surfeited with favors she never could repay, except according to the dull old recipe of being a good girl ; this put her nature on its mettle, bade it somehow reach the top, wherever that might be, and justify itself. And since she had n't a talent or an aptitude to bless her, she must, as the game was to be played anyway, fall back on the cleverer ones and coax them, through tact alone, to play for her.

Celia was never wilfully self-seeking. She was only an egotist, a little wood-animal doubling and darting because it must, a creature with the instinct of self-preservation inordinately developed. And because she must live, as she conceived it, she made love to the more fortunate, and did it badly. It had been her course all through her stay abroad. If she had not been so startlingly pretty, men would have said she was too intense, too near the verge of forwardness with no irresponsible "go" in her to complete the fun. She was always a mystery in the end, for she invariably had panic when the emotion she seemed to have challenged made its own demand. But even then she had not cared so passionately as she did now to enter into some kind of a kingdom and take Bess with her. Before, there had been a dozen colored strands of action, none of them so very strong, to make

her court supremacy — gratitude to Catherine, affection for her, it might be, the bitter knowledge that in no way save that of making good could she wipe off her score after all Catherine had done for her. But now there was Bess, passionately loved, a part of her, born of the same parents, unpicturesque though they might be, and Bess had the treasure that might set them both right with a world that demanded fireworks.

So she sat with Lovell in the arbor one summer dusk, waiting for Bess to finish her cares and come out to them, and thought, while she talked in her soft voice with the lovely thrill in it, of his money and how Bess might possibly come into it, and whether Bess could even marry him. She knew persons of a genial mind were ready enough to lend money to young musicians weighted with an untrained talent, and Lovell, above all men she ever saw, seemed to her careless enough to saunter the way of a fancy, if it were picturesque. So she talked of Bess, how dear she was, how wilfully sacrificed to commonplace cares, and how the universe ought to rock with horror while such a voice was being sacrificed that Bess might save old Lyddy's pains.

Lovell was a willing voyager on the flow of it. Whatever she talked about, the topic pleased him best. Her challenge, the intensity of her, had been the piercing call to rouse him from his ease and make him swear at himself for the grotesque futility of the past behind him. His life had one beauty-spot, the time of his short consulship, when Italy showed him her lovely face, and poetry cried to him through the nights that were but golden bridges between ecstatic days. He was off his head then, he knew, with youth and the newness of the world — too much of a boy to have been there, except as a wandering student, but put into the place ostensibly from his extraordinary capacities and really because his father had a friend at Washington. This was the

brief time of his perfect accord with life as he found it there, running back over the strings of the past, his fingers evoking a thin music of their own, all aglow in the present, and the certainty that never was the world going to see a life like his life. Then the swift foolish drama, — the Italian nobleman, wearer of a title entwined with memories, of the American and the American's wife, and the duel, and he, the American consul, on the grounds with them in a fever of youthful pomp and chivalry. But the duel ended in smoke, and the American lady was taken to England, and the Italian was doubly picturesque with more trophies at his sword-hilt; and the American consul went home under a cloud, the papers smoking with the fun and folly of it, and reporters meeting him at the pier.

His mother never knew exactly how it was. Her dim senses were easily hoodwinked, and she was thankful, in her porcelain way, that dear James had given up Italy for New England. Covered with the shame of it, dear James had turned himself, as fast as he could, into a hermit; and here he was dancing at the end of the leash a woman held. Would he have loved Celia if he had seen her even in all her young freshness in a garden of other girls, yet not blooming for him alone? He never asked himself. But she had, in her untrained way, taken a shot at him — the shot of direct address, of the fixed gaze of admiration. She had called him a poet, and this in her memorable voice. It was a challenge he had at least to remember. For the next thing she said, he was listening. And she had said many things — few of them adroit, none of them indeed personal, but all borne on that thrilling voice which seemed to be for him alone and to say the unutterable even when the words were too slight for the memory to hold them half an hour.

"Yes, Mrs. Ramsay's better," she was telling him now.

"She has n't got back her memory though. It's lovely to have her here, of course," — Celia never allowed that anything connected with the emotions was not lovely, — "only it's so hard for Bess."

"It's hard for you."

"It's not so hard for me as for Bess," she said, in her candor of giving credit, the pretty way of it so beguiling that double credit to herself abounded. "She's more practical than I am, so she sees more things to do. I should like to catch her up and run with her and never stop till she's safe from all these hateful things."

"Where would she be safe?"

"Where she could study. Where she could sing."

Celia never told anybody that Bess herself, the owner of the voice, carried it uneasily, awkwardly almost, ready to drop it in a corner if such might be and go on her unhampered way without it. That would be too damaging; and more than that, the final height to be won, after the path had been smoothed, was the will of Bess herself. In the last resort of ease, she must be made to sing.

"Where could she study?"

"In Italy."

Lovell's mind made answer, throwing half-floutingly for him to catch, the word that hurt him most — Italy, haunt of beauty, home of the emotions, picture painted by the immortals themselves to show what heavenly life might be. It was always drawing him, and the pathos of his leaving it forever beating him back. Some time, when he was an old man, he had told himself, he might return to it; but to-night, with Celia gleaming in the dusk there like the big challenge she seemed to him, Hope got him for a moment by the arm and whispered to him. He spoke, not knowing clearly what he was saying but rushing to get it over: —

"We'll take her with us,—if you'll go with me."

Celia said nothing at all, and the white of her dress showed not even a pulsation of breath. She was so still that it seemed to him he had, in putting a stop to their inconsidered intercourse, denied the course of life in her. There was no retreat now, even if he wished it, and he did wish it in a measure. His brain told him it was too soon, but his heart, that had despaired of life, was beating in a life that would be manifest.

"Celia," he said. His voice shook. He put out a hand that trembled, but it touched the air. Only it had to show the frozen maiden how fain it was of her own cold hand. "Celia, go with me." Bess was out of it now, even as a lure. "Marry me, Celia. Celia!"

But Celia had no voice. She was filled through every vein with fright, unfeignedly shocked at the turn the road had taken. She wanted to say,—

"Can't you love Bess? Can't you give us some money and not love her? Can't you give it to her voice? Oh, for pity's sake!"

Lovell spoke again.

"Say something, dear."

Then, because she could say nothing, she rose suddenly, without recognized will of her own, and pushed her chair abruptly in the doing. But she could not run. How impossible to say "no" to golden fortune, and how impossible to turn her back! If she did that, some primitive impulse in her answering the elemental in him told her she would be pursued. So she stood there in what seemed a voluntary waiting. Lovell, too, rose.

"You don't say 'no,'" he threw at her in a roughened voice. "You won't say 'yes.'" Then inconceivably, to her, because she had not realized that such things were so in-

stant in their onslaught, he had taken her to him and kissed her lips, with certainty, with passion.

"Let me go!" she managed breathlessly. "Let me go!"

But he was the master of fate, her mind still told her, though not the master of her will. She must not anger him. He was talking softly, in triumph, in the enchantment of it, close to her ear.

"No," he was saying, "no. Let them find us here. We'll tell them all. Celia!"

Her name even was intoxicating to him. He said it foolishly, and then because he found her shuddering, he was kinder, and reminded himself suddenly how rough it was to bruise a flower just gathered. But he kept her near a moment more, whispering to her.

"If I let you go, you'll leave me. I shan't see you till to-morrow. You must promise first."

Her lips, her chin, were trembling. She could not steady them.

"Promise," he was saying.

"What?"

"Promise to let it be quickly. You shall have her with you."

"Bess?"

"Not at first. Not for a minute, till I'm used to you. We'll stay here awhile. Then we'll go abroad, and she'll go with us."

"Yes," she said.

"You promise me?"

Then from his kinder clasp she did escape, and seemed to melt away through the dusk, out of the room, and though he, listening, could not hear her, up the stairs. He knew a door closed, and, with nothing to stay for in an empty house, he went away home, song in his heart, exultation in

his mind. He was having that most intoxicating of all draughts, the sweetest in life perhaps except the first drop of some heavenly cup — renewal. Life had once, while he was dancing with her, thrown her bright domino aside and turned into a zany, flouting him. Now here she was again, an angel, not a mountebank, and he was adoring her with an added passion after loss.

He went home to his grave little house and lighted candles because the dusk was too moving for him. He saw in every gleam the whiteness of a woman's gown. His ecstasy kept pounding along through his veins, but not frantically now. It was set to solid business. He was planning how he would open the big house to-morrow and put workmen into it. He even got out pencil and paper and made lists of tasks to be hastened. But he knew, though he could not without trembling too much look full in the face of his bright destiny, that he was, strangely selected, he who had failed, the master of life.

Bess was lying on the outside of her bed, resting for half an hour until she should give Mrs. Ramsay her posset for the night. Celia, in a fury of noiseless haste, rushed in and dropped on her knees by the bedside. She buried her face in the clothes and sobs shook her.

"What is it?" Bess entreated, bending over her. "What is it, lambie?"

It was one of the few tender words she knew, remembered from some childish tragedy when she had been comforted.

But Celia cried and would not stop. She seemed to herself to be washing her cheeks clean of that incredible touch. For her lips, she could not think of them. All her being had become the tempestuous sea of a great revulsion.

"How could you?" she wanted to hurl at Lovell, over

and over like stones from a height of hurt maidenhood. "Oh, how could you?"

Bess was comforting her chiefly in an inarticulate way, with strokings of the hair and little sympathetic sounds. Very soon Celia got up and wiped her wet face and smoothed back her hair. She sat on the bedside and let Bess keep her nerveless hand. At last, when the ebb of sobbing breaths would let her, she whispered, —

"Let's go away from here."

"We can't," said Bess, soothing the hand, "not while there's so many sick."

"She is n't sick," said Celia, for the first time disclosing her bare mind, unclothed by sympathetic formulæ. "She's tired of not having her own way."

Bess shook her head reprovingly, like a mother, in the darkness.

"No, no," she said, as to a child. "Folks do get sick that way. They get tired out. I've seen 'em."

"But what has she to be tired of," Celia insisted savagely, "except what I said — not having her own way?"

Bess hardly thought she could tell. But she knew this was a real thing.

"You be patient," she counselled. "Some time we'll go away."

"Should you like to?" Celia asked her eagerly.

"I'd like it ever so much," Bess answered, without hesitation. But the qualifying thought came afterwards. "I should n't like to leave him," she remembered frankly.

Celia's hand gripped hers. "Who?" she asked. "Who is it you would n't want to leave?"

Her scared mind leaped at the possibility that Bess might be thinking of Lovell, who hatefully would not think of her.

"Why, Mr. Winterbourne," Bess was answering in an

unconsidered candor. "It would be awful not to see him every day. I should n't know how to get along."

"But he does n't like us. Yes, he does like you, but it's only because you make things smooth. He does n't care about an earthly thing except to read his book and smoke."

"Oh, yes, he does," said Bess. Their secret was warm about her heart, tucked in round it like a coverlet on a cold night. She smiled a little to herself, and when she spoke, Celia caught the lighter note. "But don't you worry. Some day we'll go away. Maybe some day soon."

"What could we do?" Celia asked her, with a feverish desire to prove the way.

There was a small hope in her, too. She never forgot how Bess had been told that she had, miraculously, a perfect method. She could sing. She could induct them both into courts of ease, and Catherine, afar, would catch the echo of the plaudits fluttering round them. Celia knew she could do that instantly, if she had been the one with a voice and a perfect method. Bess answered her with the utmost simplicity, —

"We could keep boarders."

Celia snatched her hand away.

"I believe you —" She stopped.

Out of her rage she was too near telling Bess what such a thought must mean. For that instant she believed her sister had the soul of a maid-servant and no more; but the sweet temperate voice of her unwittingly sounded a recall.

"What is it you believe? Maybe you would n't like to keep boarders. But you see I know how. I could do it real well. I guess that's all I could do."

There had been a halting step on the stairs, and now Lyddy came, a small, uncouth figure lighted by the candle on the tray she carried. On the tray were also delicate cups

and napery and a steaming pitcher. This she offered to Bess with a hostile, grudging air of being obliged to enter the prevailing philanthropic folly.

"Here's their milk," she said, as if it might be their poison rightfully earned. "I've brought it so fur."

Bess took the tray and thanked her briefly. That was all Lyddy wanted. Full gratitude would have embittered the service she rendered of her free will, and made her stop to wonder whether she was going to be drawn into any embroglio of kindness, having volunteered thus much to save a step. At the door she turned.

"You go to bed arter you give that to 'em," she threw back, as if it were a missile. "You'll git wore out."

They heard her limping off to bed, and then Bess took the tray up and laughed a little as she did it. There were tears in her voice when she spoke again, and they were such rare visitants that Celia asked her jealously, —

"What are you crying for?"

"I'm not crying," said Bess; but she added simply, "Lyddy's so good to me!"

XX

MRS. RAMSAY, from having been one of the brightest stars of feminine influence, flashing down the void of a world disordered, had simply become a cipher, not even of any use in augmenting the significant figures before it. She lay prone, perhaps shocked at herself, ignoring her plight as much as possible, not calling for the children any more than she had in the days when she knew they were at hand, and compliant before the mandates of Bess as if they were budded from omniscience. She grew pretty, too, her cheeks blooming under rest, and her crisp nightgown more becoming to her than any sleazy regalia had ever been.

Tim hung about the house, not concerned, it seemed, but ready to run on cheerful errands that had to do with her, and she saw him often. She awaited him anxiously, and when he came, asked him with a querulous insistence whether he had done it yet. Sometimes he told her "yes," and then she was pleased, though not, it seemed, believing him, and when he varied his reply, through some impulse of mood, she spoke to him heatedly and bade him do it now. But she never could think of the word which was the key to what she wanted him to do. Sometimes she appealed to Bess, and begged her to consider whether it could be footwarmers or flatirons that Tim had so betrayed, and then Bess would waylay Tim at his next coming and tell him he really mustn't talk to his mother about the thing that troubled her. And what, she asked him, was the thing? Why not tell her, that she might, when she was appealed to,

know what to say? But Tim laughed at it all, in the frankest unconcern. Mother 'd been gassing all her life, he said. No wonder she'd gone dotty over words. He would n't see her that day, but he'd come again.

Bess did n't like him fully. What was the use, her practical working sense told her, of girl's prettiness when you were n't a girl? It was n't serviceable, and with Bess things had to be operative in some way before they could be accepted. Tim went whistling down the stairs from his mother's door that morning, and Bess was again out of conceit with him, for his mother would hear him and have to be soothed because he had n't come in.

At the door Tim came on Celia, bright-eyed, pink-cheeked with excitement, and blue in the dress. She held a letter in a white hand that rustled the pages into their folds almost as if he might read them. She was a model for a painter's conception of the first love-letter or some such sentimentality, and she greatly appealed to Timothy. Bess he was a little afraid of. She had no notion of luxurious ease as applied either to herself or anybody else. You had to be laid by the heels, to inherit her soft indulgences. If you could put one foot before the other, she was as likely to send you sweltering off to the store with the thermometer in the eighties because mother wanted a lemon. But Celia was a different stuff, — delicate, pretty bit out of a garden nosegay. She liked him, too. Tim had a way of talking that seemed to her very clever. It was caught, a little of it, from Winterbourne, a scrap from Lovell, and welded flimsily with some of Hunter's blunt directness; but when it was finished it seemed to be Timothy's own, and Celia, who had no picturesque loquacity, was much impressed by it. Winterbourne could n't move her because he was too rough. She could n't endure the thought of his unkempt beard, and

the words from its midst would have had to be very sweet indeed to earn her tolerance, — songs from such a thicket.

Lovell, she would have said yesterday, was tremendously clever, but to-day, with that touch of his cheek against hers still stinging it to shame, she thought everything about him odious. The letter, so hastily folded, she tucked into the little bag at her side. It was from Lovell, all an ecstasy of hope. He could not be with her that morning, it told her, because he had heard Hopkins, the builder, was going off for a trip up-country, and Lovell had to see him before he went and talk over putting the big house in order. Tim, coming down the stairs and smiling, with no idea of being married, looked like a nice playmate, and Celia smiled back at him.

“Where you going?” he asked.

She had no appearance of going anywhere, but he was suddenly enamoured of walking with her in green shade, and starting before Bess had time to weight him with an errand. But she did n't answer him directly. Her eyes crinkled with a smile and she said, —

“You always look as if you had n't a thing to do.”

Tim paused beside her and noted how soft her hair was and how prettily it grew up from her neck.

“Don't either,” he said. “I've got a lot to do, and I look it.” But she was still smiling and crinkling at him, and he responded and looked more like a girl than ever, showing his white teeth. “Well, then, if I don't look as ragged as I feel, it's because I've got this blasted pink-and-white skin.”

“Don't you like your complexion?”

“Like it? Think you'd like to have a complexion if you were n't a girl? Fellows don't have complexions. They have skin.”

"How can you say you don't like it," returned Celia, in one of her too direct commendations.

The universally popular, she had reasoned long ago, was the universally complaisant, and no harsh comment, no lost opportunity for an ingratiating speech, did she permit herself. They had, by an involuntary accord, sauntered down the steps together, down the path into the street. Now they were pacing along under its elms.

"Sometimes I think I'll stain myself all over with walnut juice," said Tim, though cheerfully, not at all fitting the gloom of his discontent. "Or black, like a nigger. This rosy-posy stunt won't do when you're going into business. It's against you. Worse than a stutter when you're trying to sell a bill o' goods."

He took off his hat to match her bare head, and ribbons of sunlight through the elms fell on the gold of his hair and lighted it to the absurdest commentary on his discontent.

"Are you going into business?" Celia asked, to keep the topic moving.

She was glad to be walking somewhere, in motion, before Lovell could hurry through his business trysts to find her. She might bear it to meet him in the street, — never, she thought, at arm's reach again.

"You bet I'm going into business."

"What kind?"

"Oh, I'm going into business all right. Say," Timothy threw at her like a return to confidential speech, "I know an awfully good thing, and I'd let anybody in that would help me. But I'm blocked, just blocked."

Celia wanted to say, "Let me in. I'm blocked, too, and I would I had the money to buy my ticket out again to freedom." But what she said, according to her way of em-

broidering the garments of common life, was a sympathetic "Can't some of us help you?"

"Yes," said Timothy moodily.

He looked like a sulky child, and with his hat struck at the twigs looking over the tops of garden fences. "Winterbourne could help me."

"Why, he would," said Celia. "Just ask him. I'll ask him for you."

"I've asked him, in a way. He's a mule. Winterbourne's a pig-headed mule."

Celia thought he might be. She had found no thoroughfare with Winterbourne. They had turned into the open road, and she indicated with a nod an old house sleeping in a grass-tangled yard, a house with blinds hanging and a wintry look of not wanting to live any more.

"I often go in there and sit on the steps and think," she said.

So they turned in and up the path where bouncing-bet was cheerful, and by and by two or three persistent sweet-williams, stragglers from old time, would bloom, and sat down together on the rickety steps under the blackened knocker.

"The fellow that owned this was like the rest of us," said Tim gloomily. "Some of us, I mean, here in Clyde. We just can't stir our stumps to get ahead, and the moss grows over us."

"Does Hopkins the builder live round here?" she inquired, with a sudden thought.

He stared at her.

"What do you want of Hopkins?"

"Nothing. I want to know where he is."

"Way over the other end of the town."

She sighed with relief, and delivered herself up to the

enjoyment of the day. Lovell, she was glad to believe, was safe with Hopkins.

"Now," she said, leaning cosily against the trellis thick with jessamine, "tell me about your business troubles."

"I told mother and she jumped on me. I'd tell Lovell in a minute if I could get anything out of him. Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I want to know."

The bees humming in the white clover along the path made her sigh with the pleasure of summer's kindness, and think, too, they were so busy, of Bess at home. Celia had an impression she should like to work, if only she could find something worthy an ornamental young maid's doing. But the present moment was a pleasing one. Here was Timothy ready to like her very much, in a simple fashion, and he had nothing to offer her beyond the liking. She need not turn and twist the pattern of it to make it more or less. She felt companioned in a way.

"Well, you'll just have to keep it to yourself."

Tim was dying to tell her. He felt very important over his scheme, and he was as yet unrecognized. His mother had threatened him when he showed her the outermost folds of it. Celia, he knew, would treat him like a man.

"I won't tell," said Celia.

"Honest? Hope to die?"

"Hope to die."

"Well, it's about an ear-trumpet."

"How funny. Whose?"

"Winterbourne's — the one he invented."

"How nice and quaint that was of him."

"Well, he'd have been quainter if he'd invented something and sold it."

"Perhaps he can't sell things. He's not that kind."

"He's too lazy. There's Winterbourne's weak spot. He won't patent it."

"I think that's nice," said Celia cosily, liking the summer sounds and airs more and more. She was only half listening.

"You do, do you? Well, I don't. Do you know how many deafies there are in the United States?"

"No."

"Do you know how many there are in the continent of Europe, in the world?"

"No; do you?"

"Well, no," said Tim, oratorically collapsing, "I don't. But I mean to before I start my company."

"What company?"

"Winterbourne won't patent his trumpet. Does it occur to you what that means?"

She shook her head. It did not seem to her much of a summer-day's dream.

"Well, I'll tell you what it means. You girls! you don't know anything that amounts to a Hannah. Somebody else'll get hold of it and patent it, and they'll make money out of it, mints of money."

"Mr. Winterbourne won't let them."

"He can't help it if they've done it."

"He'd expose them."

"Pah! what harm's that do when the thing's selling like blazes? If a man wants to hear the clock tick, you don't s'pose he's going to say, 'I won't buy that elegant trumpet because those Johnnies are quarrelling over the patent,' do you? Well, I should say not."

"It's very interesting," said Celia, because this was a word that covered so much: imperfect understanding of a dull situation, even inattention on her part. She hardly dared ask a question now after that moment's somnolence,

because it might touch the very point he had just been elucidating.

"So," said Timothy, "I'm going to get out the patent myself."

That roused her.

"You? He won't let you."

"He can't help himself. I'm not going to tell Winterbourne, am I? He'll find it out when the patent's safe and the factories are roaring out trumpets, three hundred thousand million a day, sold at twenty dollars apiece, net."

This seemed in some way to touch the family interests, and Celia felt she ought to do something; yet it was all imperfectly understood, and though ready to take an attitude, she hardly knew what one was appropriate.

"But it's his trumpet," she offered weakly.

"Well, s'pose he had a million dollars, now, that he would n't put in the bank and would n't give away and did n't spend. S'pose I saw it lying in the middle of the road to tempt all the crooks or get ground into the ruts by teams — if I said, 'I'll just cart that million dollars off to the bank for Winterbourne, and when he's ready for it he'll find it's been rolling up at four per cent,' — well, now, should you call me a good pious little boy or should n't you?"

Celia felt his own glow at the cleverness of it all. She sat up and began to listen.

"If you're going to do it for him —"

"I'm going to do it because he won't do it," said Tim fractiously, if grandly. "I expect to be paid for it. I expect to take some stock."

"Stock?"

"Why, yes. We shall form a company. Folks'll put in capital. Some of the stock will be in Winterbourne's name.

He 'll wake up some day and wish he had half a dollar in the bank. Then I 'll say to him, ' Well, there 's your stock in the Pan-pipes Company. It 's up to seven hundred and eighty now. Why don't you realize? ' "

" Pan-pipes. Is that what it 's called? "

" Yes. He named it. Bully name ! "

" When are you going to tell him? "

" Holy Peter ! If I told him, he 'd scuttle the ship. "

" You said he could n't. "

" He can't after I 've got the patent. I 've taken my first steps. That 's what mother read the riot act about. Mad ! Never saw a woman so mad. I told her the morning she took to her bed. She said I 'd got to get back the trumpet and go right straight over and tell him all about it. Well, I should say ! "

" But where did you get the trumpet? "

Tim looked at her and smiled. He sang a line of a popular song.

" That 's telling, " said he.

Celia shook her head at him. He seemed an irresponsible boy, but not to be seriously reprimanded because the texture of his intentions hung so flimsily. Tim could n't do any harm. You had only to look at him to see that. This was an inconsiderable comedy it pleased him to think clever enough to be played. It never would be, so let her take it at his valuation and give him the comfort of it. But she was as silly as he, and a quick heat stained her face almost, it seemed, before she recognized the thought that gave it birth. He was a foolish boy and this a summer-day's tale, but yet, was there something in it to coax fortune to come walking over the Winterbourne threshold ?

" How are you blocked? " she persisted. " You said you were blocked. "

"Why, there's a woman got one of the trumpets. Winterbourne gave it to her. Lovell knows it, and Hunter, too, I guess. But I wanted to get it out of her hands."

"What for?"

Here he hesitated.

"Why, if Winterbourne cuts up rough, if he swears he invented it, that'll help give him a case. I don't want one of 'em in existence besides the one I've submitted for my patent."

"But he did invent it."

"Oh, not so you'd notice it, not if he won't patent it. If I pick up an apple in the road, ain't it my apple? The one that's going to be patented is the one I've handed in."

"Money!" breathed Celia involuntarily. "Think of having money."

"Well, you will have money," said Tim composedly. "I wish the thing was something universal, an egg-beater or a glove-snap or a tack. A few weeks ago, I thought I'd invented a tack,—double-headed. No go! First hardware man damned it. But I guess there are deafies enough. Say!" From his lips even Celia did not find the challenging monosyllable offensive. It was ingenuous, confiding rather. "I believe I'll tell you how little Timothy went on his adventures to find the lost trumpet and how he got busted by the way. Swear you never'll tell?"

Celia nodded. Her color was high. He thought she was the nicest girl he had ever seen, and game to a remarkable degree.

"Say," he confided to her. "I believe you're a sport." It was a compliment of the purest water, but she could not stop to curtsy for it. "I'll tell you what I did. I laid for the neighbors of the Stapleses and I talked with 'em about hens, about eggs, about calves, about ducks. I walked out

that way every morning. I told 'em I was walking off my flesh."

"You have n't any flesh."

"That's because I've walked it off. Then one day one of 'em said the Stapleses that used to live over this way had gone to Sacker's Falls. I collared mother that night and got five dollars off'n her, and I spent it in a ticket to Sacker's Falls and a ticket back. Then I tottered round till I came on the Stapleses."

"Didn't you ask?"

"I guess not. Nobody's going to say when Jack Winterbourne hauls me over the coals that I went anywhere premeditated. I saw that sleazy daughter that's Lyddy's cousin, and she said, 'Why, Timothy Ramsay, when'd you blow down? Mother was taken away last week.'"

"Taken away?"

"Died. So I saw it was destiny, and I said, 'Where's that ear-trumpet?' 'In the house,' says she, 'and as soon as I can leave the children long enough, I'm going to carry it back to Mr. Winterbourne. He was very kind,' says she, 'but he did scare me 'most to death the night I went there.'"

"So you took it back for her?"

"I offered to, but do you s'pose she'd let me touch it? No! Mr. Winterbourne had been very kind to her, she said, and 't was but right she should pass it into his own hand."

"I don't believe she has done it," Celia reflected. "I have n't seen any such person."

"I don't believe she has, but if I meet her with it in the dark, I'm going to garrote her and pick her pocket of it. I don't want Winterbourne to see that trumpet again. I don't want him reminded of it. If nobody says trumpet, he never'll think of it till the day o' doom. I want it, though."

I want to get it into my own hands. I want to rid the earth of pan-pipes except the one I've put in train for Washington."

Celia was looking at him innocently.

"You're awfully clever, aren't you?" she inquired.

He glanced at her in some suspicion, and then enlarged perceptibly.

"How could you know it would be so easy," she pursued, "to make your application, to get people interested?"

"That's the joke of it. Who'd you s'pose I went to? Old Gregory. Father works for him."

"Then your father knows?"

"Not he. But I went to old Gregory. He took to it like a mouse to cheese."

"You persuaded him! Oh, you must be clever!"

Tim shook his head. He would gladly have had it so, but the reason was too palpable.

"Old Gregory," said he, and laughed, "old Gregory's deafer'n two posts."

"So he tried it."

"Mm. He was sitting there in his office like a frog, swelled all up. You know the kind, all bonds and truffles. You could see he ate like a pig every day of his life. Father's afraid of him as he is of old Nick. I got into the office. He looked as if he'd eat me. 'What's this, what's this?' said he. I passed him pan-pipes and poked it at his ear. Mad? My word! I believe he thought I was going to dynamite him. But what do you s'pose! he began to hear. I wish you could have seen him! I snatched it away from him then. I thought he'd eat it. 'You the agent?' said he. 'How much is it?' Then I got him to understand it was n't an ear-trumpet only. It was a gold mine. And old Gregory took hold and he's been pushing ever since. Little Timothy has n't had to do a darned thing."

Celia was listening now. She hardly knew even the terms of conventional business, and this began to seem to her a scheme of gigantic proportions, brilliant, but wrong somewhere, though where she was not exactly sure. It really looked to her as if Timothy were assuming a credit which should be Winterbourne's; but then she knew how Winterbourne would fulminate against receiving any credit whatsoever. Again it looked as if Timothy had helped himself freely to another man's property, and yet she seemed to see in him a shining altruist who would preserve to Winterbourne the fortune he ignored. Then she asked the question of all questions, —

“It couldn't make money, could it?”

It could, he told her, and descanted on the prospect until she, too, kindled. But if it was so important that Winterbourne should be hoodwinked, why was he telling his mother, why was he telling her at this present time? Tim looked at her for a moment, at a loss. He had, she saw, hardly thought of that in its clear proportions. Then he recovered himself.

“A man has to speak to somebody,” he said, and she saw. He had been too vain to keep close counsel. He was swaggering perceptibly now. “Mother never'd open her head if she said she would n't. Mother looks like Joseph's coat, but she's a good fellow all the same. Don't you s'pose I made her take the oath before I let her in, same as I did you? Did n't I swear you in?”

XXI

LYDDY was not very strong. Her back was no back at all, so far as old-time lifting or agile service went; her legs were so stiff of a morning that, if there had been no question of kitchen prerogative, she might not have come down at all. But a change was manifest in the ease of the work, and the eyes and the indifference of old age kept her from seeing why. Lyddy worshipped order, but the lethargy of her years was upon her, and Bess silently went over her tasks and made them right. But however she left the kitchen at supper-time for an evening of small cares with her patients, in the morning it was in fine array with a rigid cleanliness to be remarked. One evening, at last, she came down early on a version of the sight that had staggered Winterbourne a fortnight before: Dwight Hunter, in working shirt-sleeves of dark blue, the matted hair wet on his forehead, and a look of absorption on his face such as indicates the serving male in tasks "not realized," — a look of care, of scrutinizing worry, — was hanging the mop in its place outside the door leading down into the shed. She looked inevitably at the floor. It was damp, but carefully dried, its yellow surface shining. The enormity of his interference broke upon her, the probably long continuance of it, and Bess, the serene, felt her cheeks grow hot. Hunter also began to regard the floor and their eyes met over the clean expanse of it. Her eyes were angry eyes. He saw that, and his heart failed, not so much because he wanted to please her, but that discovery put an end to more service for her, more stolen moments of filling kerosene cans and washing lamp-

chimneys, more consecrated sweeping of floors to the end that her back should not be bent. She spoke:—

“What are you doing in this kitchen?”

He had recovered himself. The game was lost, but doubtless he could conceive other ways of easing her. After all, her displeasure was only the temporary expression of the distaste he knew she felt for him.

“I was just going,” he said. “Good-night.”

Bess, with an unconscious sense of sacredness in a floor newly washed, glanced down before she set her foot on it. But it was dry enough, and she advanced upon him.

“What have you been doing?” she threw at him. She was beautiful, enraged. Her soft, kind loveliness bloomed out hotly and flamed into a bacchic grace. He stared at her. “What is it?” she commanded, like a mother or a school-teacher admonishing erring boyhood. “Why don’t you tell me?”

“I can’t,” said Hunter with simplicity. “You’re so pretty.”

That seemed the top-notch of insult, to wash a floor and then say he could n’t answer because she was so pretty. She softened a little, making no doubt he really was touched in the brain. “Did you do this floor?” she still demanded.

He plucked up will to face her.

“Yes, I did.”

“What for?”

Guile, the friend of cowardice, came to him, pelting along with horse and sword.

“To save Lyddy’s doing it.”

Her face smoothed into the calm he loved. Its own rosy glow overspread it.

“Did you truly?” said Bess. “I think that was awfully nice.”

He felt no compunction. Joy was in him and a pleasurable surprise that it was going to be so easy to get a part of his way.

"Lyddy's an old woman," he rejoined piously.

"Yes," said she, in a thoughtful concurrence. "I ought to help her more. But I get so busy in the rest of the house. I must look out for the kitchen better than I have."

"Oh, no," said Hunter, in haste. "That would upset her. It stirs her up when you work too hard."

"Yes, I know it. Lyddy's been good to me."

"I can do a little turn like this any night," said Hercules largely. "If you catch me at it, just don't say anything, and there we are. I should feel like an awful fool to have anybody find it out."

She shook her head.

"It isn't man's work," she admonished him.

"Gammon! what is man's work?"

"Not kitchen things."

He understood, though she could not tell him, that man's work to her was the largely picturesque, the struggle with the earth and the weather, not such piffling jobs as this; and his heart swelled, appropriating its own atomic part of the general commendation. The barriers seemed to be down between them because she had reproved him,—nay, in a more unstilted fashion, scolded him as mothers do, and wives.

"This is no place for a man anyway," she announced.

"What? This kitchen? Clyde?"

She nodded.

"You're all settling down," she continued, in her tone of conviction, "like old maids."

"I don't feel much like an old maid," he ventured.

She had embarked on her certainties, evolved in thinking while she tended her two invalids.

"There's you and Mr. Lovell and Mr. Winterbourne. You've all been living alone just long enough."

"So I think," he hastened to supply.

But she was looking at him from the most ingenuous innocence.

"I can understand about Mr. Winterbourne," she went on. "He's studying."

"No, he is n't either," Hunter threw back at her. "He's reading a book he likes, and it's no more to his credit than if he read a novel. Winterbourne's as lazy as they make 'em."

The flash came into her eyes.

"Oh, how can you?" she reproached him.

He had checked their better understanding and remembered it too late. But scruples were as nothing to him. He hastened to repair his blunder.

"Winterbourne's a good chap. I've no quarrel with what he's doing. But Lovell and me — what's the matter with us?"

"You're settled down. It's no kind of a life for a man to shut himself up and do his own housework and read books."

"We don't do our own housework," he reminded her. "Mary Manahan does."

She gave a little decided shake of the head.

"I can't help it. You eat alone and go out and leave the dishes on the table. It's awful."

Hunter was looking at her with a broad smile that told, if she had not been too absorbed to see it, how dear he thought her.

"What do you want us to do?" he inquired. "Stay and clear up, or take the dishes with us?"

"You know what I mean." She frowned a little. "Sometimes they wait there half the forenoon, before she gets round."

"Oh, that it? Well, that does n't hurt me any. They're washed by the time I'm home — 'most always."

"It is n't as if you had to live that way, either of you. Lyddy says so."

His heart gave an athletic bound. Lyddy had talked about him, unsolicited, perhaps, but Bess had listened.

"It is a poor life," he said artfully. "It's infernally lonesome."

"That is n't it. It's no matter whether folks are lonesome or whether they're not. But it is n't decent."

"What better do you think we could do?"

She looked at him as if she had a pleasant secret to tell.

"You could go abroad."

"Go abroad!" That was the last thing he had expected to find hidden in her.

"Yes, you could go everywhere and tramp, and see things, and talk with folks. And you're a man and you could go alone."

"Yes," said Hunter, again artfully, "that's the cinch a man has. Now if you wanted to go ever so much, you could n't do it alone, could you?"

"I would," she said under her breath, but he caught it.

"Do you want to go?" he asked her. "Is that what you'd like?"

But the glow had died out of her; it might have been that she hastily let fall the curtain between them.

"Oh, no," she said bluffly. "Besides, I'm too busy."

He saw the talk was over, but he persistently drew her back, by more speciousness cleverly continued.

"I might like to go," he said meditatively, yet watching her. He wanted so much to detain her in this kind mood of half-intimacy that it looked as if, should she turn to leave him really, he might have to lay hand upon her skirt like

the child he felt with her and draw her back. "I went over once, the summer I was out of college."

She woke again to her warm interest.

"To Italy? Did you go to Italy?"

"Yes, I went to Italy."

"Mr. Winterbourne says you almost go crazy there, it's so — different."

The right word had escaped her, he saw. She had declined breathlessly on the bathos of this. But the fire in her lent itself to him. He remembered in a flash many things he had not thought of every day in the working stress of his life here. He had a shy passion of his own for poetry and all the lighter, brighter garland of life we call art, though he had not had space of late to nourish it, so bent was he on making good in his chosen occupations. He did have time to wonder at this new side of her, that she who was perennially in the dress of a workwoman, and whose hands knew no distaste of toil, should seem to be recalling him to the sweet hungers outside toil itself.

"You'd like it, Bess," he said, and neither noticed he had made free with her name. Indeed she, servant as she was, was too used to it to think it strange. "You'd love Italy."

"He says so," she returned, her soft eyes taking on their look of absent musing; and he felt again the t. rill of jealous rage he often had when she looked at Winterbourne or spoke of him.

"You see, I'm busy, too," he reminded her, in that unchanged desire to keep her with him.

She shook her head. Again, he saw, she disapproved, and he liked that. It brought them nearer.

"You can play on the fiddle," she said, "and you don't practise. You just see to clams and teaming."

He ventured a little rallying of his own.

"You can't say anything. You can sing, and you spend your time cooking and making beds."

"That's different. Singing's nothing. Anybody can sing."

"Now what a fool thing that is to say." He wondered if a little tender roughness would draw them nearer. "I can't."

"I mean it's so easy. If you can, you can, and there's an end of it."

"You just don't want to sing, do you?" he pursued, in a real curiosity now. "You're as obstinate as—you're frightfully obstinate."

She was looking thoughtfully out through the darkened window.

"I don't suppose I can make you see," she said. "Yes, I'd like to sing, if it would please folks."

"It does please them, doesn't it? Don't you know that?"

"He says it does."

She spoke shyly, yet not, he saw, for any reason connected with himself. It was her elderly god, he ironically thought, the man taking his evening walk now along country roads and thinking of Theocritus.

"Who's he? Winterbourne?"

She nodded.

"Yes, he talked to me about it. I'm going to do it whenever I can, so's to get used to it. He says it's my talent. So I can't fold it up in a napkin."

She looked at him in a sweet humility as if she wondered if he would confirm that; and so imbued was he with the pity of seeing her always at household tasks, that he had an absurd picture of her at a table folding something shiny in

the glossiest of white napkins she had ironed. He had rough, crass things to say to her. He wanted to accuse her: "I believe you don't see anything in this world except through Winterbourne's eyes," — but he knew she would answer, out of the childlike clarity of her innocence, that she need not. Why should she? Winterbourne was here to see for her. She was turning away to the cupboard.

"I just came down to get some water for the night," she said, and when she brought the pitcher, he began pumping for her. That was the happiest minute Dwight Hunter thought he had ever had, to do something for her with the strength of his arm while she stood by waiting, acquiescing in his service. He believed he had learned things about her to-night, things that made her more lovely. To this moment he had followed her and longed for her because the innocent appeal of her hidden nature had awakened harmonizing notes in him. Now she had opened a door, and he had looked into the ordered stillness of her mind where were desires, light, bright lamps tended, illuminating what she would like to be. Winterbourne had roused her, he could see, to at least a wistful sense that there were beauties outside her restricted room of life, paths where she might walk if she ever escaped the drudgery of the present task. He gave Winterbourne credit for that, angry as he was over her unquestioning obedience to him. Winterbourne had awakened something in her, some desire to grow. She came out of her muse and turned to him, practicality again on her lips.

"That little boy with the hair off the top of his head where he got scalded belongs to one of the men that works for you."

Hunter, recalled from the vision of her in Italy, wandering and singing, adored for her beauty and her voice, could only stare at her.

"I met him the other day, smoking," said Bess. "You'd better speak to him about it."

"Did n't you speak to him?" he responded, rising valiantly to meet whatever she might expect of him.

"I did, but he would n't care anything about me. I'm nothing but a woman. Tim Ramsay was laughing at him, and the boy thought it was grand. I'll set the pitcher down here. I guess I'll fasten up now, after you go."

There was no way but to go, yet on the step he paused a minute. "How did you know who the boy was?" he asked.

"Oh, he belongs to the club."

"What club? Mrs. Ramsay's?"

"It's the same boys. It's a kind of a glee club now. I go down two evenings a week and we sing."

"How do you get there?"

He wondered if Winterbourne went with her.

"Why, I just go."

"Walk?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Why, yes. I don't speak about it. She would n't like it."

He knew nothing about the filial use of the pronoun. She, he thought, meant Mrs. Ramsay, who might not like to have her club reft from her.

"Are you teaching those little chaps to sing?" he asked her, melted at her beneficence.

Bess laughed. Her white teeth became her.

"No," she said. "I don't know one note from another. I learn 'em things by ear, and we sing 'em together."

She was shutting the door, and he walked away. She had said "learn," and he had heard her with ears attuned to the academic speech of Clyde, but it seemed to him funnily sweet and dear of her.

Bess did not go upstairs at once. She looked about the kitchen with a housewife's intent to see that everything was in order for the night, and the perfection of it brought a sweetness of approval to her face. It had been kind of him, she knew, to do so much for Lyddy. So young a man, so handsome, — for Bess knew that about him, — so well fitted for the dashing career of "quality," must be good indeed to pay such tribute to an old woman's stiffened back. She heard Celia's step, the rustle of her dress, and waited. Celia, too, must be coming for water. She was a pretty figure out of the gloom of the doorway where she stood a moment like a picture, her soft muslin, with its lace, wrapped about her in something near enough antique folds to let you call her nymph or dryad, whatever you will that walks in beauty. The sisters smiled at each other with that lighting of the face that visited each at sight of the other, with no alloy of an expected social kindness.

"Water?" asked Bess, and laid her hand on the pump-handle.

"Yes." Celia dropped into a chair, and put her head back wearily on the door-casing. "Bess, don't you think it's queer we should have to pump for ourselves?"

Bess looked at her with widened eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Is n't it queer not to be able to ring a bell, and say, 'Bring me a glass of water'? We have to pump."

Bess stood there drawing the pump-handle slowly down, that she might not lose her stroke, bringing only a drizzle while she thought.

"I don't know," she said. "Somebody's got to pump."

Celia looked down at her own delicate hands lying against the lace and muslin of her dress.

"I wish I did n't hate it so," she said.

"Hate pumping? I'll do it for you." She began to do it vigorously.

Celia rose from her chair and laughed.

"You're such a ninny, darling child." She had heard Winterbourne call Bess a ninny the other day when she had wanted to make him fresh tea because he was late. It sounded kind. All Celia's terms were borrowed. She had different pigeon-holes for them, and used them freely. "Or else you're cleverer than all the rest of us. There, that's cold enough."

"I'll get you the little lustre pitcher," said Bess, and went back to the dining-room. She felt, not only from Celia's charms and her own tenderness for her, but from these discontents, that nothing was too good for her. She must have her draught from the little precious antique pitcher, not a kitchen clay.

Celia stood there very pretty, conscious of that, though there was no one to see her, wrapped in her own musings, and there came a knock, a soft one, at the door. She opened it at once, and a woman, a little creature, wrapped in a shawl, though the night was warm, stepped instantly nearer the sill, and lifted up an eager face.

"I saw you through the window," she said. "I knew Lyddy wa'n't here. I knocked at t' other door an' nobody come. Where's Mr. Winterbourne?"

"He's gone to walk, I think," said Celia kindly. She was always gentle. Her best manners were for all grades of an appreciative world. "Can I give him a message?"

"It's this." The little creature, with a quick proffer of it into the light, indicated a small newspaper packet under her shawl. "It's his ear-trumpet."

"His ear-trumpet?" This followed so closely on the heels of Tim's disquisition on trumpets that Celia opened her eyes at her and said at once, "Yes, I know."

"I've brought it to him," said the little creature. "I got a ride from the Falls, an' Cousin Jerry's goin' back to-night with the steers, an' so maybe if Mr. Winterbourne ain't in I can't see him; but I want to give him back his trumpet an' tell him I dunno how mother ever'd have got along without it."

"I'll tell him," said Celia. She looked so radiant under the excitement of it that the woman forgot how tired she was from the jolting of Cousin Jerry's team, and thought she was the prettiest creatur' that anybody ever set eyes on. Celia bent forward and laid her delicate hand on the paper, and Ann Staples gave it up to her. "I'll tell him," she said. "He'll be so pleased."

Then she heard Bess coming from the dining-room and almost pushed the little figure back into the night's obscurity. "I'll tell him," she said again softly, but with the brightest smile. "Good-night." She had shut the door, and when Bess came in, Celia was standing there looking strangely brilliant with a package in her hand, the hand hanging by her side, but still the package evident. Celia was listening. But she heard the light steps really hurrying down the walk, and the quick latch of the gate. Then she did turn to Bess, and laughed softly, not so much as if she were amused as excited, pleased. Bess, like the other woman, was amazed at the prettiness of her.

"Who was it?" she asked.

"Who was what?" Celia countered.

"At the door. I heard somebody going."

"Oh," said Celia, and really laughed, "the milkman."

"The milkman? Why, 't was a woman. I heard her voice. Was n't she talking to you?"

"It was the milkman's wife," said Celia. "Did I say the milkman? It was his wife."

"What did she want?"

"Let's fill the pitcher. Then I'll take it up."

"I had the greatest time finding it," Bess absently told her, filling it. "I guess Lyddy thought we were using it too common. 'T was hidden round the corner of the shelf. What's that bundle, Celia? Did she leave it?"

"It's a jar," said Celia. "Give me the pitcher. I won't wait. Come in and talk a minute before you go to bed."

"One of our jars? Well, aren't you going to leave it down here?"

"I'll put it in the pantry as I go by."

She did flit into the pantry, pitcher in one hand and the parcel in the other. But when she came out Bess, pumping for a fresh relay, thought she was carrying the parcel still, in the hand hanging by her side. Bess laughed a little. Celia's absent ways were sweet to her. Bess thought they were probably an intrinsic part of that magic state of mind and manners known as being a lady.

Celia, in her room, closed the door and locked it, and then lighted two candles and set them together on her dressing-table. She never would use lamps in her own room. They were hot, she said, and smelled. She was used to undressing with an array of candles, walking back and forth in their dim, gentle beam, thinking, or sometimes sitting before her glass illuminated by them, the light falling on her bare arms. Now she plucked off the newspaper, with a distaste for it as having come from nobody knew where in a moist, uncleanly grasp, and tossed it into the fireplace. There she set a match to it, and while it burned she took the black, worn creature it had contained and eyed it curiously. Here again was pan-pipes, the silent thing, ready to make everybody's fortune if Winterbourne would let it. She turned it over at this angle and another, and finally, after wiping it off with a

towel in every available crevice, she laid it on the table between the two candles and sat gazing at it, with the cruel wonder of youth that has suffered no lack as yet through the crippling of the senses. What a foolish little thing it was, she thought, to have such incredible importance. It looked perfectly simple, and as if anybody could have invented it long ago. She saw no special and unbounded importance in having it invented, because it seemed to her that if you got to the point where a sense failed, you probably were too old to care about using it, anyway. The milk of kindness was not soured in Celia, but no harsh birth-pains had yet brought forth from her that which required nourishing. She was a little animal, with her own hungers to satisfy. But pan-pipes answered her no question. There it lay, silent, neither unkind nor compliant; and presently she took it up, still with that distaste for something that had been the intimate companion of an old woman not likely to have been clean, and dropped it in an empty drawer. None of the drawers locked, and she threw some papers over it.

While she moved back and forth making ready for bed, she forgot to think of the candle-light on her round arms or even of the little black servitor in the drawer, and how glad Tim Ramsay would be to get his hands on it. It had come upon her in a great wave that this day had passed and Lovell had not found her. To-morrow he would, undoubtedly, but to-night, in a violence of maiden aloofness, she blew out her candles and went to her bed. Before she fell asleep, she thought incidentally that Bess had not come in, and then another flick from the drift of floating memories reminded her that she had told Bess a lie, an absurd one about a milkman. Celia smiled off into a drowse. She forgot Lovell, and remembered only that the lie was about a milkman, and absurd.

XXII

THE next time Bess slipped out of the house and down to the club-room to meet her boys, she found an excited set of them, — the gang, as they had always been, and now her most unaffected intimates. They laid hold of her, the youngest among them, and dragged her in, pouring out their tale in concert and inviting one another to shut up. Inside, the reason was evident. One end of the room had its platform and desk where Mrs. Ramsay used to sit to read tales of statesmen, and behind the desk was now a blackboard. Who had put it there? The boys did not know. They accused her tumultuously, thinking that would betray its purpose. They suggested Mrs. Ramsay, — lying speechless in her bed, poor lady, because even now she could not find the right word and would not willingly use the wrong one, — and looked at Bess with gimlet eyes, imploring her not to tell them anything so terrible, because that would mean history and dates. And while everybody talked in a sweet ingenuous discord, Dwight Hunter arrived, in his best clothes, the boys were not slow in seeing, and with his fiddle-case. He made his coming as incidental and reasonable as could be, and Bess saw at once how he could not have done otherwise than come, because he knew music and it was his logical task to teach it. The boys scuffed a little with their feet in being seated. They were not best pleased, but he was a young man they all hoped to resemble in a few years; and besides father, in each case, worked for him. And Hunter, like a diplomat, having thought it out beforehand, at once began to teach them a part-song and

never curbed their vocal turbulence at all, as Bess was used to doing. They must roar, he knew, until he was accepted. So the blackboard was not touched at all, save at the end, when the others were filing out, and the little smoker whose head had been scalded slipped up and wrote on it, while Hunter and Bess were talking, "I swore off," and Bess, seeing him erasing it in an access of shyness, yet understood, though not knowing that, according to the older delinquent's proposition, he and Hunter had sworn off together.

Presently it happened that she and Hunter were walking homeward, and she was gentle to him, in a contrite way, having seen how little she had known the good that was in him toward Lyddy and his fellow boys. The last farewell said to them by the gang was from the most adventurous boy of all, who slipped up to them on their way, having followed so far because his voice and resolution failed to inquire before.

"Say," said he, "what 's the blackboard for?"

"Write music on," said Dwight, adopting a like form of terseness as being the most complete medium at this degree of friendship.

"So 's we can sing it?"

"Yes."

"Gee!"

Then Dwight and Bess walked along rather silent, he eager not to lose any instant of putting himself forward in her acceptance, yet made soft and still by the atmosphere of her at his side. She seemed to him something very strong and sweet, able to do most things, but strangely needing protection meanwhile, to be obeyed because she was so wise and good, and to be planned for always. Yet this being civilized life, and conversation the code of it, he sought about for words and found them logically in Mrs. Ramsay.

"She does n't deserve to get on her pins again," he announced, when Bess had represented her as improving.

"Why not?" said Bess, with an open-minded candor.

"She's made an everlasting fool of herself. Don't you think she's made a fool of herself?" He was sure of his ground here, remembering her flattering implication that kitchen-work was beneath a man. "You would n't want votes for women," he said admiringly.

"No, I don't want to vote, specially," said Bess. "But I might have to."

"Why should you have to?"

"It might seem best."

"You don't believe in a woman like Mrs. Ramsay, leaving her children to riot and Winterbourne playing nurse to 'em. What atom of good has she ever done?"

There was no heat in this. It was all one to him whether the Ramsay children grew up to be Hottentots, but he wanted to understand Bess profoundly.

"No, I don't believe in that," said Bess. She seemed, as she often did, to have difficulty in expressing her strong conviction. "But I guess she could n't help it if she felt just that way. Some folks have to act as they have to, even if it never does any good, don't they?"

Dwight was silent for a moment, while Mrs. Ramsay, her manuscripts, her handbag, her benevolent service to a world that intermittently smiled at her, rearranged themselves in his mind. He began to see in her the first dusty reformer, disfigured by the dirt she has kicked up in her own path, the unconsidered rubble that will go to the foundation of goodly temples. He was under the dominion of the woman's mind in that clarity of sympathy that comes through the *rapprochement* of what we call love. He guessed out reasons and feelings in his lady before she voluntarily dis-

played them, and every one of them redounded to her own dominance over him. Now he saw, Bess was not a woman bent on lowly service because it called her. She would administer, if affairs beckoned her, and with as humble a mind. Mrs. Ramsay had been the rebel who went untidily about upsetting the machinery of ordered life because she must, and Bess was of those who would answer the call to put it in order. But he did not reflect that Bess was of a generation later than Mrs. Ramsay, and her discontents, if she had them, would be of another complexion. Perhaps she had none. He had seen, as Winterbourne had, though not with as clear a recognition and power of formulating, that, however Bess might strain in the collar of hard life, she was not an image of resignation but of obedience.

"Good-night," she said.

They were at the gate, and he had not talked to her, he knew, with any degree of cogency that would urge her to think of him after he had gone. She was opening the house-door softly because it was simpler for no one to know she had been away, and he went on with his fiddle-case. He thought of what a man had said to him once of the girl he had meant to marry, who died in her beautiful youth: "When you 're older, you take fancies to women; but when you 're young, you know."

He knew. All he wished, in this beguilement of the summer night, was that they two were in a simple, savagely natural life together, on an island perhaps, where the large calm look of the earth and heaven would fit her, and where they could be as happy as the child she was.

He was not surprised to meet Winterbourne, smoking, hands behind him and eyes bent on the ground. This was his favorite walk, to the little bridge and back again. After that he usually went on to the Ramsays' and patrolled the

house half an hour, called out Harriet to ask if the children were safe and Ramsay had got home. Once he saw Ramsay's silhouette on the curtain, in the children's sleeping-room, a distraught outline, hat atop, as if Ramsay, like his wife, could never pause to take off travelling gear. Winterbourne chuckled at that. He was glad Ramsay had been kicked by destiny into some fellowship with his own children. What business had a man to beckon souls into this precarious world if he did n't mean to be their guardian after they got here? Sometimes, after his late return from town, Ramsay came up to the house to see his wife, and this strange pair, about whom nobody in the world knew anything except that they had brought into the world beautiful children, were left to a ten minutes' communion, Mrs. Ramsay perhaps forgetting her words, and Ramsay affected by it in a manner no one could estimate.

To-night, on his musing course, Winterbourne stopped at Dwight's nearness, and gave him good-evening. He did not notice the violin-case. He was not used to marking the detail of life unless it concerned him personally.

"Looks like dry weather," he said.

"Yes." Dwight stood a moment, staring at him and thinking of Bess. "Winterbourne," he said without calculation, because it burst from him, "she believes in women's voting."

"Who?"

"Bess."

Winterbourne laughed softly under his breath.

"Bless her buttons," said he. "Mrs. Ramsay been at her?"

"No. It does n't sound like conversion. Sounds as if she thought it was common-sense. That's how everything sounds as soon as she gets hold of it."

"Well," said Winterbourne, "why not? For heaven's sake, why not? Why should n't Bess Hartwell be setting the town in order and not my infernal house? I'd have her for mayor if I could. She'd clean us up mighty quick. She'd mend this highway." He planted a great foot three inches lower in a hole and kicked. "The infernal fools! They plough up the sides of the road into the middle, and we live in mud from March to November. It ought to be an absolute monarchy. You and I ought to be put to breaking stones to make good roads, or building pyramids for tombs of poets — Jim Lovell'd go in there — Jim's a poet —"

So embarked, Dwight knew he would go on world without end, lulled by the sound of his words, largely careless of their intent; he made no scruple of interrupting.

"But look at Mrs. Ramsay."

"Mrs. Ramsay's a criminal," said Winterbourne, starting on. "She ought to be walled up alive. They'd have done it in the good old days."

But as he went Winterbourne's mind abode with Mrs. Ramsay, and while it formulated her, he muttered, cursing her with his fervid tongue because she was derelict to duty and yet doing her ample justice within that tribunal inside him. Poor, careworn, worried housewife over a world disordered! This was what he saw she was, single of aim, sincere in every flurried raid, without vanity, in evidence everywhere because, like the older enthusiast, she who might have spent herself in religious consecration, she must bear her testimony. Not an abuse of them all but she had fought it; she was the champion of peace, of suffrage, of forest preservation, of temperance — what cause lived where Anna Clayton Ramsay's name was unheard? She had broken her own nerve on the wheel of the universe, and here was the small planet of which she had vowed to be vicegerent, to

keep it sweet and blooming, rolling through space with nothing to rule over it but the far-away greatest God of all Who lets His underlings play what tricks they will with governance and mete out to themselves their own desert.

Winterbourne got quite angry over it all, as he stumped along. He saw Anna Clayton Ramsay now as the worshipper of order in the large, not in the little. She had been willing to leave her own house windows blurred that the world's windows might be clearer toward the light. Yet her own children had to look out of her windows. He went home in a temper. Bess, carrying one of her abounding trays, with its two glasses of yellow drink, met him in the hall, and was smiling only in passing. But he took the tray from her and steadied it on a newel-post while he hurled at her, —

"I'm as much of a criminal as Anna Clayton Ramsay."

"Her door's open," Bess indicated, in little more than dumb show.

"I don't care. She's a criminal. She ought to be on bread and water — ball and chain — iron cage like the old French cardinal's, forever damned. She lets her house go to thunder, and I let you try to keep mine from going, and some day you'll drop in your tracks, and I shall fall into the pit with Anna Clayton Ramsay."

"She's sick," said Bess. She was smiling at him in an affection that seemed to say, "I am faithfulness, too, as well as love. As I smile now I shall keep on smiling."

"Don't care," said Winterbourne. "Bess, do you think there's anything better for a man or woman to do than just stick to their job?"

Bess had one of her moments of incredible density.

"What job?" she asked.

"Oh, you little ninnyhammer! the job he finds facing

him when he opens his eyes on this infernal world. The job he makes for himself. Anyway, his job. Aren't those four yellow-topped children over there Anna Clayton Ramsay's job?"

"There are five," said Bess. "Don't you count Tim?"

Winterbourne looked at her and grinned. She was beyond words provoking, and often he had a glimmering sense that her response to the obvious might be only the veil of what she really thought.

"Bess," said he, "sometimes I think you're not half such a fool as you look."

She broke down then and giggled, and sat on the lower stair and laughed noiselessly until she cried two round clear tears that rolled down her pink cheeks like little worlds in a heavenly sunrise, and Winterbourne had the sudden inspiration that Dwight Hunter, if he were there, might think with rapture of kissing them away.

"Bess," said he rashly, "do you like Dwight Hunter?"

She looked up at him in recovered seriousness.

"Better 'n I did at first," she answered at once. "He's so good to the poor."

"Good to the poor? My buttons! What's he done?"

Bess thought she knew, but she fancied she was in the confidence of the young philanthropist.

"I just thought so," she said. She rose and took on her manner of quiet practicality. She laid her hands on the tray.

"No, no," said Winterbourne. "I'll carry it up. I ought to be court-martialled and shot for not toting everything for you, you little nigger. Bess, I never saw you really laugh, before."

Her lips curved again.

"I guess I don't laugh very often."

"Is it because you're too infernally tired all the time? I bet it is. This thing has got to stop. There's going to be a wench in the kitchen, and Anna Clayton Ramsay's going to be carted off to a sanatorium, and Lyddy to the work-'us, and I'm going to send for a grand piano and a pile of books, and you're going to be crammed with culture and sent abroad to marry a wicount. Now I'll carry up the tray."

At the head of the stairs Bess took one glass from it and went in to Mrs. Ramsay.

"You carry in the other," she commanded.

So Winterbourne unwillingly, even startled, as not having foreseen the path his helpfulness would lead him, took on himself the task of Ganymede and went into his wife's chamber, she sitting pretty and rosy against pillows, not in the least, he grudgingly thought, Bess and her cares still in his mind, like any invalid he ever saw. The old eager look leaped into her eyes at sight of him, and he, giving her the glass awkwardly, met it with a kindly one. If she was not sick — and sometimes on his evening walks he doubted whether she was not able to be very much on deck — she must be encouraged to a better state of things. She had something to say to him, and pointed out the chair at her side.

"John, I think Bess believes in the immanence of God."

"Of course she does. She's too healthy not to."

"Do you mean her physical health?"

"Of course I do. Partly. Her blood flows true. When she stands upright, there's a line from the throne of God going straight through her and pinning her to the earth. And the currents go both ways, up from the earth and down from God."

Catherine did not know what he meant, though it sounded mystical and she strained her tired mind to see if she could

get out of it something valuable to be salted down. She had a great idea of using things afterwards, not perhaps for competitive display, but in some fashion to add to the richness of life. Winterbourne also did n't quite know what he meant, only that it was exactly as Bess seemed to him.

"What makes you say it's because she's healthy?" Catherine groped again. "If that was so, the people with the strongest bodies would be the most spiritual. And they're not."

"Anything that's unspoiled believes in God," said Winterbourne dogmatically. "Anyway he believes in Him enough to be afraid of Him or fight Him. Bess is such a perfect darling she believes in Him and loves Him."

Catherine did not think he ought to call even so filial a creature "darling"; but she let it pass, finding in herself scant strength for any controversy.

"Afraid of Him!" she said. "I can understand that. 'Caliban upon Setebos.'"

Winterbourne had not read very far in the poet Browning. He said, after one trial, he had no music and was a slovenly workman besides. It was n't because he was cryptic that people had to cut paths through his labyrinths; it was because he had been too cocky to take pains. So he shared the impression common among others in a more humble intellectual walk, that Setebos was an island.

"I don't know anything about that," he said. "I only know if there's a thunder-shower, I'm afraid and put my head under the bedclothes. When the sun comes out I strut. That's because I've heard Zeus speaking. Bess would n't do that. When the lightning wakes her, she probably pops her head up and says, 'Want something, Father Zeus? What d'ye lack? Hebe asleep? Ganymede gone on a tout? Want me to carry a tray to somebody?'"

"John," said Catherine, almost in a portentous tone, "did you know that Anna Clayton Ramsay believes we are God?"

"Does she?" Winterbourne responded grimly. "Well, I never've seen anything in Anna Clayton Ramsay personally to support her claim."

"I have always been an agnostic," Catherine went on; but Winterbourne forgot she was sick and to be considered, and emitted the sound that served him for a groan.

"An agnostic, Cat! You're not an agnostic. Nobody is but a few old dickeys that have read books till their heads are addled. You've just got hold of a lot of terms, and they've choked you up so you can't breathe. You're like a mouse in a rag-bag. The bag shakes so you can't even make a nest there."

"But you're not a churchman yourself, John," she reminded him.

"A churchman!" said Winterbourne, with scorn, getting out of his chair. "I believe in Jupiter, and so does Bess. I swear by Jupiter and I swear by Bess. So does Jupiter, I bet you. We're a close corporation."

Catherine was looking at him and frowning, forgetting to drink her egg-nog. The glass shook a little in her grasp, and Winterbourne steadied it for her.

"There, there," he said with a gruff kindliness, "drink your milk."

But he wondered at the same time how a delicate creature like this could be fed all day long and continue to absorb it. Catherine had not finished her queries.

"She says I must pray, too." The phrase held wonder.

"Bess?"

"But she does n't know any prayers except 'Now I lay me.' I had her get the prayer-book and read me some. She quite waked up, John. She said they were beautiful. But I

persuaded her to go to church, a week ago Sunday, and last Sunday she wouldn't go. She said it made her sleepy."

"Good for Bess! Don't you interfere between her and Jove, Catherine."

"It is n't Jove." Her eyes grew larger. It looked even as if she had been frightened by something sacrilegious perhaps, and Winterbourne, noting that, thought it seemed like terror at seeing sacred unapproachable things brought to the aid of the market-place. "She said I must pray for strength to do what I ought to do. But when I asked her what I ought to do, she said she did n't know. What do you suppose she thinks I ought to do?"

Winterbourne did n't know either; but the imp inside him that commented on current events suggested it might be that she should cease drinking egg-nogs and get up and behave prettily.

"I asked her if she prayed night and morning, and she said no, she was too busy. Don't you think that's the queerest thing?"

"No. I think it's the most outrageous thing I ever heard."

"Oh, she did n't intend to be outrageous." But though he had not meant that, he would not tell her what did seem to him as outrageous, that the child should not have time for her baby-prayers. "But when I asked her when she did pray, she said, 'Most all the time.' Does she seem to you like a religious girl, John?"

"She seems to me like a martyr in this abominable house," Winterbourne muttered within his beard.

"What? But this is queer, too. I asked her if she knelt to pray, and she said no. She said if she did that folks might see her and it would take her mind off. Now if she's as devout as she seems, shouldn't you think she'd be glad to be in difficult circumstances?"

"No, by thunder!" said Winterbourne, "I should n't. She's a perfectly normal creature, and she knows the Almighty understands her like a book. She knows she needs every grain of powder she's got for warfare. She is n't going to spend any popping off at marks."

"Do you mean the conservation of energy?"

He hated his colloquialisms when they were so belabored.

"Good-night, Catherine," he said. "You'll be tired."

"You were dear to come," she told him. Her face smoothed out, and the brightness ran back into it. He had the shamed pleasure of escape, flavored with the certainty that she would want him to come again.

XXIII

WINTERBOURNE went down into his particular sitting-room, where the windows were wide open and the night breeze came in, thinking at first that he would light his lamp and read away the hours that always seemed to be at his command for this loved pleasure. Sleep was not so necessary to him as it used to be, and he often found himself wishing it was not desirable at all. Though he thought he had a healthy acquiescence in the course of things, the wane of physical life, the going hence into a decreed obscurity when the body is no more, he kept a steady serious love for the earth and her beauties, and no hours of day and night together were enough to exhaust his tried passion for her. But to-night even Theocritus seemed a task. He was a little tired, more with a weariness of the mind from his few minutes with Catherine than from the day itself. All his occupations now, he would frankly have owned, were play. It was play to help Dwight Hunter run up and down the rows of carrots with a wheel-hoe, fun to think their feathery green was his because he had evoked it from the earth, fun to go clamming and come home so full of salt air that his body was one great appetite, and then to stretch his legs and smoke. But when inconvenient questions began to play upon his brain, then he was tired.

His problem now was to save Bess from her task of nurse and kitchen-maid; but she would not be saved. She knew more than any of them about the scared mind of Lyddy, fearing more invasion, trembling over her kitchen

rights, wondering, in spite of her trust in Winterbourne, whether she might not be crowded out altogether and perhaps end her days with the relations with whom she had had perpetual warfare. To Winterbourne, Lyddy was a dear old creature intimately connected with his own life; but even he did not see through the crust of her cantankerousness that she was a pathetic old woman with a trembling heart. For her sake Bess would have no other kitchen help. Therefore, the only other factor in the problem was Mrs. Ramsay, and she must go. Sick or well she must go home to her own job. The phrase pleased him, and he bit his teeth on the stem of his cold pipe and repeated it grimly. Her husband and her children were the job she had undertaken.

Then suddenly, under his breath, Winterbourne began to laugh. He continued, though still softly, because no unrestrained mirth was so necessary to him as to bethink himself not to call down something feminine from above to inquire what the matter was. Even Bess would have broken his self-communing into pieces. The cap he had meant for Mrs. Ramsay had been suddenly caught by some breeze of fancy, whirled about and settled on his own head, and, to his pathetic terror, it fitted. What if this house, what if the wife he had married and the attendant train of circumstance, were his job, as Mrs. Ramsay's gold-topped children were hers? He had for the last few years avoided fruitless speculation over the earlier part of his life. Having settled that he and Catherine were to live apart, he chose not to dwell upon it any more. It had seemed to him that he had turned out of a way that led nowhere—a path where you were expected to keep flowers always blossoming, but where there were fragrances too heavy for the normal nerves, into a broad highway, and here the world was

walking up and down on its sane, commonplace errands, and it was a man's chief pleasure to look on. But could it be that, having entered the choking path and begun to water the flowers there, he had got to continue cherishing them? Possibly nobody earned exemption by merely wanting it, and was it his task to recognize that he still had a house, in the warmest meaning of the word, and that it was his task to set it in order and keep it so?

He resolutely turned back to the beginning of it all, when Catherine had left him to go abroad, and they had both realized that it was for their lifetime. This was his deed. He had not said it should be so, but he had made it so by dividing the property and showing her that his was to be henceforth a different order of life, one that she not only was unfitted to enter, but that she would not wish to share. He made himself recall pictures he had then resolutely put by as part of the hurt of life that need not be perpetuated. Why should a man in the light of modern day scarify himself with knives of penitence? He saw her wan face when they parted, the pathetic eyes that seemed always to be beseeching him to make her happiness. It was n't he, he often wanted to tell her, out of his first savage impatience at it all, it was n't he that had the power of life and death over her happiness. It was life itself. This present world, if you let yourself be imprisoned by the passions and desires of it, is a bad box to be in. That, she never had the wit to recognize. She looked to him as the inferior god who could weave certainties, just as Lyddy turned to him to make her safety. And he saw now that if it was his job, he had got, if not to cause her happiness, to help her to endurance.

Winterbourne, in his way of long reflection, was always recognizing the pathos of woman-things who are so in love

with happiness. Yet perhaps it was being in love with beauty really, because, satisfy the ideal in them, and they will starve, walk over hot iron, accept martyrdom gladly. It made him angry with them, furious, that they should keep on carrying this banner of the ideal into the market-place, and expecting men to rally round it. It made so much trouble, not for him only and his busy mates, but for the women, too. Why was it that they had to worship this absurd romance, the glamour that exists only to veil the hard condition underneath? Nobody could meet their impossible ideals, nobody but the poets on the printed page; the poets themselves were no such admirable figures, unless, indeed, they were dead.

His mind went wandering off into the past where there were knights and that kingdom in the air called chivalry. It was enchanting to him, too, the aerial framework of it, when he saw it in the sky. But how men who were making trusts and fighting trusts, rolling over and over, their teeth at each other's throats in the dust of the highway, could be expected to see gleaming cities above them, armies fighting in the clouds, he could not guess. Yet the unalterable conviction never left him that Catherine looked to him for her happiness and to no one else. And he had, in the years so far behind them that they two were no longer the two they were then, given her the biggest of promissory notes. But nature, as colossal in her brute way as the soul of man, had risen up and denied her joy. He could not create it for her, because they were different people now. How could he make her serene when she made him uneasy? With Bess he was as much at ease as if she were a pretty child playing in the yard while he pursued his chosen homely tasks. If he called her to look at a butterfly, she would come, say 'Pretty,' and return to her own as simple deeds. But Catherine, if he

summoned her to see the butterfly, would flush and glow and ask him if he meant the soul. They were not mates of kindred tastes, going hand in hand together through a world they saw with the same eyes. What should be done about it now? Should he try to make her see with his eyes? The petty tyranny of it! Her way was as good as his, if he could stomach it. Should he try to see with hers? Impossible. It would wear out his endurance in a week, so that he would have made himself more cruel to her than before. Yet, he saw more plainly, the more he forced himself to look the state of things in the face, that it could not be shifted. It was his job.

XXIV

EVERY morning Winterbourne went over to the Ramsays' and started the children on their day. At first, finding Tonty doing it, he washed the faces of Teeny and Tiny, but this he gave over because Tim, seeing him at it, had laughed. Winterbourne set a big bowl on the play-room hearth as a spot that might be slopped with impunity, and Tim stood in the doorway several minutes, creased with mirth, to note the stoical forbearance on the nurse's face, the look, suited to the children's expectations, as if he liked it. Yet Winterbourne did it badly, deft as he was, because Teeny and Tiny, from his participance in it, would regard it as a game. Winterbourne looked up and saw him, and at Tim's morning face of smiles, he frowned.

"Come here, young man," he said. "Take a hand yourself."

But Tim refused and gave the variety of laugh known as a snicker.

"You go ahead, Jackie," he recommended. "You're doing it elegant. Nobody can do it as elegant as you."

Winterbourne dried a shining pink cheek tenderly with a towel too smooth to take the water, and albeit full of holes. It was all he and Tonty had been able to find.

"They're your own blood and bone, young man," he said. "You'd better take a hand at them now and then."

But Tim shook his head sunnily and went away whistling. The wise Tonty heard this, and it gave her a serious look for a long time after the children were clean and until the day's carnival had made them dirty again. This was the first

time she had suspected that Jackie's deeds, done for them, were not a part of his pleasure. Now it seemed that they were tasks, undertaken from benevolence, though she did not know so long a word, and the knowledge graved another line in her understanding of life, a line that should some time set its visible counterpart upon her forehead also. From that morning she herself washed the two smallest faces, and bribed Tony, by means that led to her own penury in toys and dearest possessions, to wash his. Sometimes the bribes were big enough, sometimes they failed, and then Tony went smooched like a coal-man. But the two little ones she could manage by the sleight of her vigorous young arm, and they were made to rise the earlier that she and they might have their daily battle over the tub.

Tonty was very much hated about this time. Often her lavatory offences were not forgotten all day long, and she was an outcast from her clan. On Saturday only there was a riot known as full bath. Of this little Harriet had official charge, but so ill did she accomplish her mission that Mr. Ramsay himself, the unknown as much almost to his children as to the town, plunged into the breach and either scrubbed his offspring or in some dark fashion ensured their cleansing.

Winterbourne felt at one time a grudging appreciation of Mrs. Ramsay. Here she had been known as an absentee mother, and yet, behold, the children were manifestly in greater disorder than before her exile. This, in a modified form, he said one day to Tim.

"The children evidently miss their mother very much," he conceded.

Tim replied with an airy cynicism, —

"They miss Mary Flaherty, that's who they miss. If Mary'd come back, we'd all be as smooth as silk."

As smooth as silk they had never been since Tim's birth, yet everything being relative, it might seem so now.

But a solemn morning had come when, summoned by Bess, the children were to see their mother, and the three of them, marshalled by Tonty, set forth on the road, with hair just escaping from its *douche* and brushing into the curl nature had long ago decided upon, and cheeks shining pink. Tonty had thought the proprieties demanded that Tim also should go, but he had drawn the sheet up to his chin and bidden her forge ahead and let a man sleep. Tonty reasoned that he also was a child, though so long a one, and it seemed an ill return for the clemency of Bess in bidding them to this great ceremonial not to respond fully. They all had an imperfect idea of what they were to see. Once they had potted off alone to a woman's club in town where mother was to speak, and had never reached it at all, through an incomplete understanding of the way; but they had brought up at a cider mill, and been taken home by a farmer in the edge of the evening, soaked through and through with the juice of apples, and heavy-headed with sleep. But this was a festival decreed and they went toward it gravely. They were four beautiful children, the sun lighting their golden tops, and whatever raiment they had on hidden by four of the dirtiest tiers mortal child was ever clothed withal. Bess saw them coming their eager straggling way, and went down the path to meet them. She appraised the tiers, and regretted them, but said nothing, knowing from the care on Tonty's brow that the best possible had been done, and to criticise would be to add a darker veil to that sweet, serious face.

Bess had a little table set out in the arbor. There were heart-shaped cookies for it, by and by, and goblets of morning's milk. She took a hand of Tony, for he was frowning by this time in suspicion of the quest, and went in with a gay

alacrity, as if it were a very nice errand they had come on. Tony squirmed a little to get his fingers away from her strong ones, and his face twisted slightly. He wanted to roar out with the candor of the natural man and demand what he was here for anyway, on strange stairs. But even as he longed, his small legs were lifting over the treads, and he reflected that after all he was a man; and then he was in a pretty room and a lady lay there in bed, with a ruffle round her neck, and he was led up to her, the others following, and told, "Here's mother." Bess released him then and gave the others a kindly little poke to get them into line, and turned about and left them. She had things to do in the adjacent room, and her good sense told her to let Mrs. Ramsay see her children unhindered. But really nobody but Tonty, who pondered many things in her heart, and had kept a clear memory that Jackie had told her mother was sick and gone away to get well, knew it was mother at all. It was a nice pink lady with smooth brown hair, the braids of it coming out on each shoulder of her nightie, and she was looking at them steadily. There was a good deal of the baby in Tony, when he was not on his native ground. He got uneasy under the look, and thought he would turn away in a minute and begin to whistle; but somehow he stayed staring back at her, and really in his confusion and the strain of it all, he wanted to cry. But the lady looked at Tonty now more directly than at the rest and said plainly, —

"How dirty their shoe-strings are!"

She had meant to say tiers, and the innocent word had flown away and incontinently escaped her. All the corners of her mind that had to do with speech were disordered still. She would have a great deal of repacking and labelling to do there before she could put her hand on things in the dark. Tonty frowned anxiously, and bent to look at their pathetic

feet. She had insisted on shoes to-day because it was a Sunday occasion, and the mismated yawning gear she found had not justified the valor of the search. Yet the strings, soggy with dust and wear, had not seemed to her inferior enough to merit scrutiny.

"Come here," said Mrs. Ramsay. More pink had run into her face and her eyes glistened. Something in the spectacle of four clean faces in the morning sun, four gleaming heads, seemed to her noteworthy. "Kiss mother," she invited them.

Tonty gravely did it, and with her duteous right arm brought Teeny and Tiny to the scratch. They would have kissed anybody that looked as pleasant as the lady in bed, if they happened to feel like kissing. Being normal little animals, they sometimes felt so madly like it that they could have kissed the turkey-gobbler if he would have put his feathers flat long enough for them to stop being afraid of him. And again Helen herself might have wooed and seen them taking to their bosoms some damaged doll of sawdust lineage. But Tony was in no such vein. He stepped back a pace, and his freckles stood out roundly over the pallor under them.

"You ain't mother," he said hoarsely. "I won't."

"Of course I'm mother," said Mrs. Ramsay remindingly, almost meltingly, for he looked to her a very nice little boy. Besides, she was hurt. "Why do you think I'm not mother?"

Challenged thus to the point of pure reason, Tony was ready, with indisputable proof.

"Mother," said he, "wears a bonnet — and gloves."

Mrs. Ramsay seemed to collapse visibly in the bed, and stared at her little boy, not to put him out of countenance, but with a sincere desire to comprehend him. She had begun

to wonder about her children, how they were doing without the wise brooding she made no doubt she gave them. Having summoned them, she had seen them, in candid anticipation, flocking to her breast. But here was a set-faced little boy, hands clenched across his rotundity under the dirty tier, and he abjured her. Mrs. Ramsay had never felt so small, not when a statesman, in open meeting, challenged her statistics.

Tonty was mortified. She felt partly the hostess of the meeting and partly the mother of the three piebald waifs, half-clean half-dirty, like illustrations of the origin of evil. It was her part to offer some gracious consolation to the repulsed lady, the while her good little right hand itched to lay upon Tony the smacking he deserved.

"Shall you come home soon, mother?" she inquired, with a sweet precision, and Mrs. Ramsay replied that she should come as soon as she stopped remembering her cerebellum. And here Bess, judging the interval by the amount of work she had done in absence, considered it time to remove the guests, and swept them all downstairs before her, almost tumbling over one another now in their eagerness to escape, and out to their arboreal banquet, where even Tonty, released from the spell of the attractive but exacting lady called mother, chorussed with the rest.

While they ate and choked ecstatically, Winterbourne on his own mission, self-appointed, the child of last night's reverie, appeared at his wife's bedside. She was quite placid. The time for her mid-forenoon drive was not yet; she had had breakfast, and to lie unnoted, by the world forgot, was as near release from her haunting nervous miseries as she could now attain. But here was her husband, something that looked like eagerness shining in his eyes; really it was only the determination to be a good boy.

"I want you to dress, Catherine," said he, "and come out for a walk."

She looked up at him in a terrified amaze. The time was not many weeks ago when she would have hailed the invitation as the pæan to the bride, and gone with him light-footed. Now she had passed into that no man's land where bed is the house of refuge, and its laws concern risings and sleepings and the administering of food. In so far as he would drag her forth, he was an invader, her enemy.

"Where's Bess?" she helplessly besought him. Bess, being omniscient, would know whether this thing had to be.

"You need n't put on all your things," he encouraged her. "We're going down the back path to the Valley of Birds. Nobody'll see you. In ten minutes I'll knock."

He left her, and when the door closed behind him, she could feel no relief. She knew he was on the other side of it, inexorable, and that here was the chance she had come back to seize — of being a wife after his own indifferent heart, now mysteriously requiring her. She did get up, and she did dress, the outer covering only her pretty *négligé*; and with a shawl over that and her braids down her back she looked like a frightened creature reft unprepared from home. She opened the door uncertainly, hoping he was gone; but he was there in the plenitude of his strength and mastery.

"That's a good girl," said he. "Now take my arm. We'll slip out at the side door, and nobody'll be the wiser."

Bess, she prayed, would be the wiser. All her hope lay in championship, at some random point, when they went through the house. But the sitting-room, the blinds closed toward the full sun, lay in a clouded peace. Children's voices came from the back, but that was not the way they were going. Through the door he drew her, in a haste she found it hard to follow, and down the path between the carrots,

through the gate and into a green lane. Midway in the carrots she had a recurrence of her sense that it was absurd to have them there, encroaching toward the house, but it was only a comment of the mind now. Her feelings were engaged far otherwise. Since she was going to die before they reached home, what matter whether carrots had been sown or asphodel? The lane led to a miraculous pasture here in the outskirts of the town, pine woods, a violet bank in the early days of the year, and a spring. But in the midst was a circular knoll, and this was where they were wont to come to sit, and here nested the birds who had found out that in Winterbourne's woods they were never shot. There was a peculiar orchestral effect of them here, as if the way the valley lay drew in sounds from all woodland quarters, and in the evening it was brave to hear the "kling" of the thrush, and fancy you were in deeper coverts.

Catherine knew its beauties and repute, and that the way to it even, the winding lane with roses and tangled blackberry, was like a road to summer; but to-day the forms of things rose darkly before her eyes, and the smoke of glory, as from an altar where beauty burns before high God, was absent. But still he bore her along, talking a little, in his big voice that sounded louder than it need, and she could not answer. Winterbourne never heeded that from anybody. He was of the race of the born soliloquist. What he said was the innocently egotistic expression of his own mind, like savage man roaring in the wilderness because something in him demands release. After a long time, it seemed to her, they were in the Valley of Birds, and Winterbourne released her arm with a breath of content over his clever purpose.

"Sit down on the bank, Catherine," he bade her. "Lie down. Lie on your back and look up. Don't you call this better than the ceiling of a room?"

She did lie down, but on her side, and put an arm over her eyes to shut out the hateful trees.

"We must come by dawn some day," he said, disposing himself on the grass with satisfaction. "That's when the birds get in their work. Little devils! to say all they've got to say while they're alone; they know we're tied to our beds by sloth and civilization, because we use up everything we've got in the course of twenty-four hours and can't renew ourselves in time to be up at the morning chorus. If we held service in the woods, we should know a few things we don't now."

So he rolled on, forgetting Catherine, forgetting every preconceived determination, and conscious of what he sometimes called, in moments of formulating, the Pan feeling, the sense that he was at one with his habitation, the earth. The earth currents ran without let through his veins, and he was not too old to feel his heart beat with a serene ecstasy. He murmured to himself now stanzas of poetry, the meaning of it, the English or the Greek of it not mattering, so that the sound seemed to his ears to fit the diapason of the time. Winterbourne felt blest, as he lay and looked up into his own trees. Here he was in a seclusion he could govern, as deep, so far as the ear and eye went, at this point, as if forests encompassed him. He had the robust health that lets a man still answer the call of beauty and of life, and disordering emotions were far behind him. And then his eyes, following down the curious fretwork of a tree-hole to the needles below it, were caught by the blue and white figure stretched there in its unthinking grace, and he remembered the woman-thing he had brought out to lie in the lap of the woods and be mothered by the great kindness of the air.

"Cat," he said softly, "you asleep?"

"No," she answered, in as still a voice, not taking her

arm down from her eyes. "John, how are we ever going to get home?"

To her, also, it was the primeval wilderness, but with a difference. He, in his musing, found himself shocked back to verities. Here he had been regarding the wood festival as a deep solemnity, and she was wondering how she could get home. But he bade himself remember that Bess said she was sick, and little as it looked like it, treat her as one incompetent.

"You don't want to go back yet," said he. It was a kindly tone, almost the one he would have used to Tonty, only she never would have been so incomprehensible. "You want to get yourself soaked with the air and the sun."

"The sun must be on me," said the muffled voice. "I'm very warm."

"Wait till that sunbeam creeps down the pine at your left. Look at it, Cat. See how it lights the bark."

She put her arm closer over her eyes.

"Do you think you could go home and get Bess?" she asked him.

Her voice had a sound of terror. Winterbourne thought he heard the prophecy of tears. But it at once became evident to him that she was depending too entirely on Bess, and this was the matter. Take away her staff, and she would walk alone.

"You don't want Bess," he said reprovingly, and yet in a kindly way, too, because he could not, in his heart, imagine how anybody who had known the ministrations of that calm strength could fail to call on her.

"I do want her," Catherine cried.

He scented hysteria the more nearly.

"I'm going to die, John. I'm willing to die, but I hate the feeling of it. Call Bess, or you'll be sorry."

The insistency of it did move him, as a woman, let her be demanding enough, is sure to move a man. He yields out of a large affectation of good-nature perhaps, out of chivalry, of boredom, he may tell himself; but the boy in him answers the mother in her and he gives way.

"You're a silly, Cat," said he. Nevertheless he got on his feet. "I'll find her, but Bess'll tell you you're a silly."

At the edge of the clearing he stopped. She had called him back. She was sitting up now, her eyes distraught, the color in her face disordered.

"Let me go, too," she cried. "I can't be left here, John. I'm afraid, afraid!"

Winterbourne returned to her. This, in a measure, he could understand. He took her wrists, drew her up, and kept one hand within his arm.

"Come on then," he said. "I know what you're afraid of. I felt it myself once, by the sea, in a bright day when there was nobody in sight nor likely to be."

But her teeth were chattering, and she shuddered while he led her out. It was nothing to her to know what she was afraid of, while the dreadful place loomed dark about her and the way through the lane stretched into impossible miles.

"It was Pan," Winterbourne's cheerful voice boomed against her ears, "the god Pan. He's in the stillness, you know. He makes himself manifest because we omit his worship. But the fear's all he expects of us. That's recognition. That's all he wants, old Pan."

But naught heard Catherine save that words were beating at her ears, and she felt her feet drag heavily. Midway in the lane she stopped, and found a little voice.

"It's over, John. I'm dying."

Winterbourne, recalled from Pan, got an arm about her, and looked down into her face. And then her knees really did give way, and the weight of her on his arm was the only sign of her being a creature still in this world. He looked at her distraught, but for a second only. The spring — he thought of that — was behind them. For an instant he considered leaving her there by the pathside, and running home for Bess; but if she was ever to wake she might wake frightened and that would be infernal. Pan might get her, after all. So he lifted her to his heart, and carrying her as he might have carried Tonty, for she was very light and he was strong, he strode homeward as fast as he could go, and once he put his cheek down to hers and then kissed the tangle of her hair. It was a pity Catherine could not have had the kiss in the days when kisses freely given would have beatified her; but perhaps then she would not have prized this kind at all, for it was pure, warm pity of something he had hurt. And when he came out into the carrot-patch, there was Bess, as if their need had summoned her, standing like a sea-woman perhaps watching for her husband's boat, hand over her eyes in the attitude of those who look and wait.

Winterbourne thought he had never been so glad to see any human creature. He felt like throwing Catherine at her and himself also into her arms — those kind arms, in the illusion of his need, seemed big enough — and blubbering like Tony on her breast. But all he did do was to stride on, and say in a monotone when he reached her, —

“I've killed her, Bess, I've killed her.”

Bess turned, and, he noted, stepping over carrot-plumes with precision, went on with him. She took up Catherine's lax hand and held the wrist a moment.

“I've killed her, Bess,” he said again; and she answered

him quite seriously, as if she had to believe every word he said, —

“No, no, you did n’t mean to.”

And then Winterbourne despaired indeed, and knew Bess also judged that Catherine was dead. He carried her into the sitting-room, as still now as it had been with its morning peace upon it, and laid her on the old hard sofa. Bess meantime flew for brandy, for several things, he thought, for she came back with her hands full; but before the brandy had fairly touched her lips, Catherine’s eyes opened, and Winterbourne, looking down upon her, gulped and said, “My God!” He wanted to say it a great many times, knowing it would be a relief to him, but Bess gave him a quick frown and shook her head. He knew he must be derelict indeed for Bess to frown at him, and took it meekly. Catherine had things administered to her, and resumed her aspect of a human creature with blood in her, and then what did she do but turn from Bess whom she had been crying out for, who was her rescuer, Winterbourne would fervently have sworn, her earthly hope and prop, to him who had dragged her from her bed and taken her out into the tree-solitudes to hear dissertations on Pan. She smiled even, and when she spoke there was a little undertone of pleasure in her voice.

“Did n’t we have a nice time, John?”

Winterbourne could only stare at her. Then he grinned a little. Catherine was game, he thought.

“You help her upstairs,” Bess commanded, with her air of giving not much attention to the present outward state of things, having so much to think about.

So Winterbourne put his arms about his wife and lifted her again, though Catherine had been willing to take less of him, and carried her up in silence to her bed.

When Bess came down, her kingdom being once more in

security, he was waiting for her in the hall. His hand was closed upon an idle pipe. Not even that solace would he allow himself until he knew where he stood as criminal or sound citizen.

"Going to hit me, Bess?" he inquired. "Going to turn your old father out of doors?"

But she had no questions to ask. There was too much to do in the world, and she had got out of the habit of curiosity, save as it furthered deeds.

"I guess she'll go right off to sleep," she said, "after she's had her milk and egg."

He followed her to the kitchen.

"What was it, Bess?" he insisted.

"Why, she fainted away," said Bess, as if faints even were all in the day's work. "Here, you measure me a pint of milk while I beat these eggs. It's time for Mrs. Ramsay's too."

Hercules did it with precision, being used to chemistry in his youth.

"Is her heart wrong?" he suggested. "Don't you think she'd better see a doctor?"

"She's just give out, that's all," said Bess, with one of her returns to the vernacular. "She's got no strength. That's the way they are."

"They!" Who were they? He pondered on it weakly and dared not ask. Had Catherine entered some classified estate never more to emerge to the vaguer limits of the mass? But he had to inquire finally, or perish with the wonder of it.

"Who's they, Bess?" he insisted, following her like a boy, tagging her while she went from kitchen to the stairs again with her two foaming beakers deftly carried. She was treating him like a boy, too.

"Why, folks when they've used themselves up," she vouchsafed him, almost impatiently it seemed, because he did n't know. "They get just this way. Mrs. Ramsay's done it one way; she has another. Men-folks do it, too. Sometimes they drop dead when they're making a speech. That's because they've wore their hearts out. Sometimes they get just like this."

She was halfway up the stairs now, and he stood fingering the newel-post in a maze.

"Then it's getting worn out?" he said. "Bess, hold on a minute. If it's getting worn out, how about you? I don't suppose the rig you're running here, being nigger dog to everybody, — I don't suppose you think that's going to wear you out, do you?"

She looked gravely down at him and made the answer he least expected.

"It might, I s'pose, but I don't mean to let it."

She went on, leaving him confounded. He had looked for some gay disclaimer, some bravado of youth flaunting its own strength, but the brief homely words opened his mind suddenly to the idea that she was fighting a fight and knew it. She was not only serving other people, but she had the masterly sense to see that she, too, must be saved.

"By Jupiter!" Winterbourne swore. He dared not call, as he so often did in mere warm blood, on the Most High God of all, because it seemed, in a way, as if he dared not, as if he himself had somehow offended by being out of the fight, and if he challenged the God of all, he might hear answers.

CELIA had to meet Lovell at last, and hearing him in the sitting-room, asking Bess for her, she went straight about it, taking a hat in her hand : for though she walked bareheaded always, it seemed wise to indicate that she was on her way out of doors. In the hall she met Bess, who had not lingered with him, and flashed a glance at her. No, he had not told. Bess wore her air of serene pre-occupation, not as one who has learned that an unexpected brother has stormed her threshold. And then Celia, with the frankest air of morning welcome, unillusioned by the memory even of kisses in the moonlight, went in to meet him. He was changed. The first glance at him as she advanced, hand prettily out, told her that. As that other moment had shocked and terrified her, it had transfigured him with hope and confidence. He looked like a splendid young man of another type than Dwight Hunter, but as fortunate in strength and prospective mastery. She felt a thrill at this, which might have been a little personal pride in him, but was more than half gratified vanity that her momentary conqueror was of an admirable mould. Lovell himself, if he had had time in these fleeting moments of the best days of his life, to look into a mirror and interrogate himself, would have wondered at the change in him. The old wary look lest the undesired should speak to him, the introspective beginning of bent shoulders, had given place to the tense muscles and high pose of the man set on victory. His love for Celia was so infinitely more than a fancy or a passion for a girl. She had called him out of that seclusion where the soul is practically done

for, because it has taught itself to desire nothing. Now he aspired to everything. If he had had any design of a tenderer greeting than this hand-clasp in the morning light, he could not, in the face of her frank attitude, bring it about.

"I'm going to walk," she said. "You want to come?"

"I came to get you," said Lovell, at once delighted at their according views. "I want you to come over to the house a minute."

"The house? What house?" The candid glance inquired as her tone did.

"Mine."

"Why, I can't, Mr. Lovell."

The set tittle he did not like. He frowned at it, but dismissed it as matter that might be settled at some tenderer time.

"Why can't you?"

"There's nobody to go with me. Mamma is ill in bed. It would be queer."

That he considered seriously.

"Nothing's queer in Clyde," he ventured. "Except me. I'm tabulated queer, but I'm not going to be any more."

"Oh, do be queer," said Celia brightly. "You must n't change, or I shan't know you."

"I shan't change about — other things."

This was a brief indication that love-making was not to be superseded by the overhauling of houses. "But I want you. You've got to come. Hopkins is putting off his vacation for me, and we must know what to do."

"Who's Hopkins?" Yet she knew who Hopkins was.

"The builder. How can he tell whether the missus'll like her house unless she gives the orders?"

That note in his voice almost angered her. She did not love him apparently, her appraising sense of the moment

told her. She was sorry. It would have been so easy, living in the big house with him, to take Bess to her and establish both their lives.

"Come," she said, for it was evident he had meant in another instant to find her hand. "Come on out doors."

She spoke lightly, as she thought Tonty, just arrived to make her mother a proper womanly call, might have spoken, and she went immediately out of the room, he following. Then he had his inspiration.

"Why," said he, "there's Winterbourne!"

"Where?"

She was going down the path, her pretty dress enwrapping her, he felt, with similes surging about him, like the calyx of a rose. She hummed a little under her breath, and he knew that he was following her into the land of faerie. But he would much rather stay and get the house ready for their mating.

"If you want a chaperon, why not Winterbourne?" he pressed it. "He's always wandering up and down the earth. He's got nothing to do. In a minute we shall see him sitting under a tree somewhere, and we'll call upon him to come and hear us talk ceilings and gutter-pipes."

Celia laughed and sang a little clearly. Winterbourne was not going to be told secrets about engagements. But there was no danger. She knew where he was; he had gone down to the Ramsays' to lull three little Ramsays into seemliness with old wives' tales while Tonty made her call.

"I can talk ceilings just as well outdoors," said she. "Come, let's go into the Valley of Birds. Mr. Winterbourne's down there lying on his back, smoking. Come."

Lovell fell into step with her and they went down the lane, Celia singing in her light true voice, with a regret she could never help behind it, that hers was not the marketable

one. Then we should see. Out in the open day, daring came on her, and a sense of mastery over such a helpless thing as a man in love. Why had she dreaded to see him? He could n't kiss her, because there would never be any moment when she was unprepared. He could n't marry her against her will. He was a well-made creature with a dominating look now there was something he wanted to dominate; but she, too, was good-looking, and she could take a hand at reigning. And the woman's desire to play with what it has caught possessed her, and she liked it. She had been all her later life the plaything of another's will. Catherine had pursued her into the desire to be something of mark, and now suddenly, through nature and not herself, because a man was a man and she had inexplicably bidden him remember that she was a woman, she stood queen in her own right. At the wood-opening she stopped and turned her candid eyes on him.

"I don't believe —" She hesitated here, and he helped her tenderly.

"What don't you believe, dearest?"

"I don't believe I want Mr. Winterbourne told why you are taking me to see the house. I don't want anybody told."

That seemed fitting in her, a most maidenly deliciousness. He was a poet, and he thought he saw with her the lovely vague outlines of her dream.

"Don't you, dearest?" He bent toward her, better to note the flush in her cheek averted now while she broke a spray from the wilding hedge, and showed the more to him her sweet confusion, — for it was not a blossomy spray, but only a homely branch to give pretext to her eyes and fingers. "I want them to know. They'll have to know, you see. If we were back a century or two, I could carry you off to my stronghold, but not now."

"I'd like that better," said Celia, and laughing, looked at him again.

It was not a confused face she turned on him; it was just Celia's face, untouched by soft emotion. But he was in his dream, and she looked to him any way and of any hue the dream required.

"I should like it better, too," he said; and her heart leaped in a kind of resentment at his voice and the messages it was willing she should hear. "Then it could be now. It could be to-day."

Celia did not know she had so many fierce passions in her, and she walked quickly on as if, though they were within, they were also a mob that could overtake her. She had had her discontents, a plenty, but this virginal revolt against a man appealing always, some secret voice in him to a hidden voice in her, and getting an answer even, if only of anger and despite, this was new to her. She hurried their pace into the Valley of Birds, and sat down by the tree-bole where Winterbourne had bidden Catherine, that other day, see the play of sunshine on the bark.

"He is n't here," she said. "Mr. Winterbourne is n't here."

Lovell, too, threw himself down and looked at her, tumultuous feeling in his eyes.

"I'm glad," he said. "Good man, not to be here!"

His spirit seemed to be getting the better of her, and she found herself wondering whether it would dash her self-control, make her betray herself and show how much she hated him.

"Do you come here often?" she asked crudely.

He laughed a little.

"I used to come a lot. That's when I wrote poetry. I thought it had got to be written out-of-doors. Jackass!"

He was smiling with an idle patronage for the young poet who had, after all his shots at greatness, yet managed this last crowning feat of man: persuaded a wonderful girl to love him. His momentary retrospect released her. For an instant she did not feel the summons of that inner self of his laying fine wires to her door. She could afford to play a little in her turn.

"I want to know your poetry," she offered meltingly.

The poet, surprised, came broad awake, accusingly.

"You said you 'd read it."

She caught herself up. Her laugh came on the dot.

"So you did remember," she challenged him.

"Getting a rise out of me? Is that it?"

"I meant to find out whether you did remember."

"Well, I did. I have n't thought of much else. It was n't the verses. It was your reading 'em. It seemed so —"

He could not think logically of any particular thing it seemed to indicate, except that it was destined and adorable.

"But I do want to know them better," she insisted. "I want to hear you read them. I wish we had the book. We could read them here."

Lovell, shaking his head in decisive turns from side to side, looked at her in something more nearly approaching a query of her real complexion of mind than he had ever shown. It seemed to ask whether indeed she could be cut out of the pattern, or anything approaching it, of the ladies who bade him to teas with a horrible prospective tendency to yearn over his verse.

"Not on your life," said he. "You don't catch this minor poet reading his own stuff."

"But why?" Celia persisted, with a delicate upward lilt of tone. "You know so well how it ought to be read. You could interpret it."

That had a familiar ring. Was this the way the Ramsay faction used to talk when they besought him to share his gifts with them? He felt a wave of the old nervous terror.

"Don't, dearest. You'll make me begin to be deaf."

"You can't be deaf with me. You promised."

"I ought to have made you promise, same time, not to flatter me. I like other kinds, dearest. Tell me you like me awfully. That's flattering enough. Don't tell me I'm a poet. I'm just what Tony's bending pins to catch. I'm a minny, not a whale. Not a trout even. Just a minny."

"Do you think," said Celia, "that Tim Ramsay is n't very well understood?"

"Tim?" He showed his frank surprise. "Why, there's nothing about Tim to understand."

"You'd say he's all on the surface?"

"What there is of him. He's got a nice complexion. That's on the surface."

He was looking idly before him now, following the wavering course of a white butterfly that had somehow strayed into the cool of the woods, and went wandering about, drawing indecisive curves upon the air, like a weak hand striving to form lines, and hesitating.

"Don't you think he might have good ideas," she ventured, seeing, in this mood of his, how far away they were from pan-pipes and patents, "if somebody would only help him develop them?"

"Ideas about what? See that butterfly. He's lost in the infinite."

She had time to stop and widen her eyes over the butterfly.

"If some one would help him out," she ventured.

Lovell did n't understand. He began to give a lazy disquisition on Tim, who had never seemed to him any-

thing but an unmarketable commodity whom Mrs. Ramsay had, in the period of her discontents and unformulated theories, summoned into the world. Perhaps he was like Ramsay, save that he could n't figure. Perhaps he was the memory of Mrs. Ramsay's girlhood, before she became a caryatid with a world or the temple of the millennium on her head and hands. But he did not know how to elucidate Tim's prenatal tendencies or his present faculties to an idealizing young woman who was caught by his complexion.

"Oh, Tim's all right," he said absently. "Do you like white paint all over the house?"

She smiled and shook her head at the paint.

"You see he wants to make a business venture," she pursued, though doubtfully. "And I feel as if he ought to have the advice of an older man."

Lovell threw her a quick look.

"Tim Ramsay been talking to you?" he inquired.

She retreated. She thought there was displeasure in his tone.

"Oh, no, not talking. Only he seems pathetic somehow. They don't teach him to do anything —"

"He would n't do it if they did. Tim's lazy. He's got no stamina. That's why he's lazy. The boy's no better than a weakling girl."

"There, you see! you own he's to be pitied."

"You're divine," said Lovell, falling into his coma of blind love, "you women. You idealize and pity and build up pedestals, and we're no such matter as you think us." His mind had gone suddenly back to his mother and sister and their adoration of him, and with this passion for a girl opening his eyes to the way women's fancies ought to be cherished, he wondered if he had been kind to them. "But don't waste anything on Tim. He never'll grow up. You'll see."

"I'd waste something on him," she dared. "If I had it, I'd waste — money."

The word was out, the word she had at the back of her brain, but she said it like a pretty jest. Again he threw her that sharp, sudden look, and it stayed on her.

"What's Tim been saying to you?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing," she protested. "Only I somehow got the idea he was clever. I thought he might invent something, had invented it, and I thought with his father always in the city and his mother sick — why, it seemed a shame no one should help him."

"He brought something of the sort to me a while ago," Lovell said absently. "No, I should n't give Tim money."

She rose to her feet.

"Come, then," she wanted to say, "the talk is over. This was what we were to consider, and since it's ended and you won't, there's nothing else."

He, too, rose, and stood staring at her, awed by the strained pallor of her face. He had never seen her look like that. It was as if the white butterfly, strayed into the large darkness of the woods, had suddenly become the soul of which it was the symbol, and wanly faced him. Celia's eyes filled with tears. She looked about her at the tree-trunks and the light sifting down beyond them. It was all beauty, that impalpable veil upon the form of things to bid the soul worship and the eye rejoice in the prophecy of the ineffable. That it was beautiful she saw, but she could not beckon it to her heart with that glad rush of music to the ear. She had muffled herself so that the call of things failed to reach her. She had spun about herself a web. What was it? She thought of Bess with a little breath of relief, a grasping for her as if that might keep her sane. If Bess were here, she would see the beauty. She

might be too tired, she might have to shut her lovely eyelids down and just lie and listen to the needles murmuring; but she and the spot would be akin. Celia did not even know whether Bess had ever been here. She felt indignant pity for her, tied down to common tasks, and it seemed as if she must be at home that minute, kissing her and telling her how wroth she was. But it did not come to her, since Bess had been trained to do all these hard, hateful things and she had not, that she could make her less tired.

All this time, a moment only perhaps, but long to both of them, Lovell stood watching the tragic misery of her look, waiting, in an extremity of sympathy, for it to clear. She turned to him slowly. The guarded sweetness was off her face. She seemed to be about to appeal to him, to beg him to help her brush away the web; but the color ran into her cheeks again, and she laughed hardily.

"Come," she said, "let's go home."

They went, silently. Once in the lane he tried to take her hand; but she seemed remote, and a sad strangeness assailed him.

"What is it?" he asked at the door. "What was it, Celia?"

Now she could laugh again.

"What was it?" she asked, in her high, clear voice. "Why, nothing!"

XXVI

WINTERBOURNE was at the Ramsays' while Tonty made her dutiful call. He had Teeny on one knee and Tiny on the other, and Tony sat before him, legs apart in painful travesty of man's majesty, whittling, but not omitting to keep a sharp ear out for the story.

"Once upon a time," said Winterbourne, musing and telling the story to himself, as he almost always did when Tonty was not there, for then he could tell it to her, "once upon a time there was a little boy."

Tony gave a nod of perfect satisfaction. The story, then, was for him.

"Everybody thought he was a little boy, but he was n't. He was a fool."

Tony, disgusted, withdrew from participation. But then he remembered there were kings' fools, and they always said the best things and came out ahead. So he took heart.

"Was it a king's fool?" he asked hopefully.

"Maybe," said Winterbourne. "We'll see before we get through. Well, one day when he was quite a young fool, he found he had some money in his pocket."

"Gold?"

"Yes, gold in a silk purse. He had n't really known he had it, but as soon as he thought about it a minute, he remembered that every little boy and every fool has some to buy things with. Only he must be sure he buys the thing he wants most, for if he does n't, he'll be sorry all his life."

Tony whittled no more, but, knife on knee, sat staring

up at him. There was poignant anxiety in the gaze—hope, too. Had he also a silk purse, since it was said that all boys had them? Winterbourne read the query.

“No, Tony,” said he, “you won’t find the purse for a number of years yet. But you’ll find it in time, and then you must be sure to buy the right things with it.”

“Did this fellow?” Tony asked, abandoning hope for himself. He was used to these postponings of valuable experience to some future which was, apparently, to be his at a shadowy time. It seemed to him a part of the disgusting way things were arranged. You had to acquiesce in them for a while because grown-ups had a way of knowing how to keep them out of your reach; but when he saw Dwight Hunter driving a pair of horses, or Winterbourne smoking a pipe of heavenly dusk, he knew this would not be so always.

“Well, this fool looked round, as soon as he found he had the silk purse, and he saw a pretty child—a little girl she was—”

“One of us?” Tony inquired.

“No, not one of you. But he liked her, and he said to the big Market-Man, ‘How much?’”

“Where’s the Market-Man?” Tony inquired.

He would never have been allowed to interrupt so frequently if Tony had been there, and this he knew and it gave the moment piquancy.

“He is said to live up in the sky,” said Winterbourne. “But besides that He lives on the earth and in the sea.”

“Is He a whale?”

“No, He’s bigger than a whale.”

“Then He could n’t live in the world without our seeing of Him.”

“We do see Him sometimes. We could oftener, if we didn’t think about anything else. Well, the fool asked

the big Market-Man how much, and He said, 'All you've got.'"

"Did He look in the silk purse?" asked Tony. "Or how'd He know how much he had got?"

"No, He did n't look in the silk purse, but He knew what the price was, because it's always that. If a fool wants to buy a little girl, he must always pay all he's got. He can't have any tops, or any engines, or any bow'n' arrers. One reason is, little girls are so hungry. They eat a lot."

"Tonty don't." Tony accorded this in rebuttal.

"No, but Tonty hasn't been bought yet. They're not half so hungry till they're bought. Anyhow, if they are, they don't say anything about it. But there's lots of things they want to eat, then, pretty things, all of them. They want to eat rose-leaves and violet-leaves and cream and honey and cinnamon and nutmeg and clove and mace."

"All together?"

"Yes, all together and separate. And they want everything to smell like roses all the time. Well, when the little girl had lived with the fool a long spell, she thought she would buy her a little girl of her own, and she did. And she had to eat rose-leaves and violet-leaves and cream and honey and mace and nutmeg and cinnamon and cloves. And the fool got tired of seeing them do it, for he wanted beefsteak and bread and clear water —"

"I'm hungry," Tiny piped from his knee, and Teeny wriggled with antiphonal protest.

"So he said to the two little girls, 'You run away and play in a garden where you can get rose-leaves and violet-leaves all the time, and I'll go back home where I was, and lie down under a haystack and go fast asleep.'"

"Little Boy Blue!" Tiny remembered.

"So the two little girls went off into the garden, and I dare

say they just crammed themselves with violets and roses, there were such a lot there, and the rivers ran cream and honey, and there was cinnamon on every bush — ”

“ Stick cinnamon ? ”

This from Tony, who chewed it in lieu of the tobacco he had seen other yet not greater men gloriously squirting.

“ Yes, stick and ground. All the guns were loaded with cinnamon powder. They shot moonbeams with them. Well, the fool went back, and lay down under the haystack. ”

“ Was Boy Blue there ? ” Tiny inquired.

“ Hush up, ” said Tony, “ there ain’t any. ”

He had reached the period of agnosticism when it soothed him to announce, from point to point, that there were n’t any.

“ No, he ’d waked up and gone to look after the sheep. But the fool went to sleep. No, only just half asleep. He could hear the birds singing and the leaves moving and the river running by, and other fools talking while they worked, or bought little girls themselves. He had a beautiful time. But pretty soon somebody touched him on the shoulder. ‘ Wake up ! ’ said some one. It was the little girl. And then he looked up and rubbed his eyes to get the sand out of them, and what should he see but the little girl he had bought and the little girl she had bought. And he saw the little girl she had bought had bought another little girl, and there they stood, the little girl he had bought and the little girl she had bought and the little girl *she* had bought, three of them in a row. ‘ Wake up, ’ said the little girl he had bought. She said it quite loud, so he could n’t say he did n’t hear. ‘ We’ve all come to live with you. ’ ”

Teeny and Tiny were both wriggling now. They did n’t think it was much of a story. But Winterbourne only kept a clutch on each little back and went on with it. This story he was telling to himself.

"So the fool waked up, and he tried to stay awake. But he could n't really. The birds were singing, and they made him sleepy, and the river was running, and that made him sleepy, and he heard the grass growing, and that made him sleepy. But he could n't tell the three little girls they must go and build them a house of their own. So he said, 'Come in. You're welcome. Help yourself.'"

"In the haystack?" Tony inquired.

"Yes. And they came in. But pretty soon they said, — two of them said it, — 'Where's the rose-leaves and the violets and the cinnamon?' And he said, 'There is n't any.'"

"Which of 'em said it?" Tony wanted to know.

"The little girl he'd bought, and the little girl she'd bought. The other one just ate bread and drank water. He could get things for her as well as not."

"Then why didn't he keep her, and send the others home?" Tony inquired, with masculine insight.

Winterbourne shook his head and screwed up his face in a way they, for some reason, always liked.

"That's it, Tony. You can't do it. After you've bought one little girl, she's your little girl, and you can't go round swapping off for other little girls. No, sir. Well, there were n't any rose-leaves, and there was n't any cinnamon. And if he'd had his silk purse back again, so he could go out and buy 'em, there would n't have been anything to buy beef-steak and bread with, and he'd have had to starve. Tony, what do you think you'd do?"

"I'd let *them* starve," said Tony. "They would n't starve long. They'd go into the kitchen."

"Admirable Tony!" Winterbourne cried. "Wise young judge! Sage from the Orient! Has it been put into your mouth, O babe and suckling, to guide my murky way?"

Tony for an instant thought he was being made light of, but as he was a young man of proud self-estimate, and Jackie, he had always considered, merely his toy and tool, he decided to dismiss the suspicion. Yet it clung slightly to the word babe, disquietingly like one in more familiar use; but this he knew could never be applied to him.

"Well, what 'd he do?" asked Tony.

Winterbourne sat dejected.

"I don't know," he owned. "No, I'm blest if I know. Sometimes I think if he was any kind of a fool, he'd say to 'em right out, 'Now, if you're going to stay here, you come into the kitchen and eat bread with me.'"

"Lyddy's in your kitchen," said Tony. "Only Harriet's in ours. Lyddy makes little cakes like a heart and that girl gives 'em to us."

"Lyddy? Lyddy is n't a girl. She's a woman-lady."

"No, that other girl. Bess. She gives you things to eat."

"Yes," said Winterbourne dreamily. "She gives you things to eat. Well, Tony, so you think they'd go into the kitchen before they'd starve?"

But Tony had forgotten about that. He wished Jackie would invite them all to go home with him, where the girl undoubtedly, at a hint, would give them cookies.

"I guess Harriet won't cook us anything to-day," he offered speciously. "She don't ever cook little cakes."

"Or," said Winterbourne, "suppose he should say to the big Market-Man, 'I'm very sleepy, sir. I like my bed here by the haystack. I hate to sit in parlors, smelling cinnamon and rose.' But would the big Market-Man say, 'You made your choice, Winterbourne, old boy. I'm sorry, sorry as I can be, but it's the best I can do for you. No more snoozes under haystacks, listening to the birds. No more deciding you'd done your stent and you could loaf the rest of your days.

No, you're going to keep moving now. There's likely to be a watchman on the tower, and it's got to be you.'"

He pulled himself awake. He had been near swearing, in the distaste of it all, but he remembered who sat with him and upon him, and forbore. But he had been talking in a grown-up tone, and they were tired of him. Tony shut his jack-knife and put it in his pocket with a manly air. The two little ones groped their way down, and they all began to make new plans for themselves.

"Now you run into the kitchen with Harriet," Winterbourne bade them. "Tonty'll be home in a little while. I'm going back that way and I'll send her."

But Tony had plans of his own. He saw Winterbourne well up the road and set out with a man's stride, head down, after him. He was going to the house where there lived little cakes with holes in the middle. Tony, at this period of his life, had the hard lot of one who plays a difficult part. He was such a very little boy, and yet, at moments of dashing imitation, so proficient, that he forgot, and everybody else with him, how little he was. Therefore his career was dotted with ignominious surrenders.

Tonty had made only a short call, but Bess thought she needed refreshing after it, and had a little plate and a cup and saucer waiting on a small table in the sitting-room. There was a pitcher with milk in it, and a little teapot with hot water in it, and a little sugar-bowl, because Bess knew how much rather Tonty would sit down and pour play tea for herself than have any number of children's festivals administered as to a child in any arbor. Tonty loved it. She got out of her chair and put a small kiss primly on her mother's cheek.

"Should you like to have me come to-morrow?" she inquired.

She herself was not particular. She could not find out whether the pink lady known as mother, who never got up, really wished to see her or not, and she often found her face burning, when she escaped from the prudish little calls, with the effort to think of something to say.

"Yes, Antoinette, come to-morrow," her mother bade her. "Brush your hair at night and use the pink paste on your elbows."

Tonty went downstairs then, being familiar with the fact that the lady known as mother said queer things, but accepting it in a child's way because the lady known as Bess seemed to accept it. Then she had her little luncheon and poured a small cup of cambric tea for Bess, who took it gravely while they talked about dolls and whether they liked black ones or whether they were just horrid, and then they went off together into the shed-chamber where Bess thought she had seen a little trunk for a doll's clothes. And Mrs. Ramsay lay and looked at the wall-paper and thought of nothing at all. The working force, the laboring class of nerve and muscle within her, had taken its revenge. It was on strike. Her nerves had been driven at the pace of forty thousand motor-cars for years and years, and now they had lain down in the harness and said, "We won't go at all." Suddenly Mrs. Ramsay had discovered how blissful it is to do nothing, and neither ideals nor shame under the ministrations of her neighbors could woo her forth. Bess, the puissant, could not stir her. Now, she had announced, Mrs. Ramsay would be the better for an afternoon drive; but Mrs. Ramsay would not hear to it. She did not even answer. She turned her smooth brown head on the pillow and said she thought she felt huffy, which Bess, considering by skill of her own, interpreted as sleepy.

The lady's illness had roused waves of consternation and

sympathy throughout a world. Letters had come from scores of clubs, reminders of imminent engagements, warm expressions of concern : for Mrs. Ramsay was a power. But for these, though she must have known their sources, Mrs. Ramsay did not care. "Open them," she said to Bess, when the first consignment came over from Mr. Ramsay, helpless in the emergency of a wife whose business was a book as tightly sealed to him as his had been to her, and they had gone naturally into Celia's hands. She was a graceful scribe, and wrote charming notes of explanation, venturing, with every hint of an engagement not to be fulfilled, to suggest that Lilian Winterbourne would sing ballads, and enclosing the little circular that had never brought in a return. Only one club accepted the proffer of the unknown Lilian, and when Celia, against all probability of her thinking of it with anything but terror, flew to her in triumph, Bess turned on her eyes of amazed reproach.

"Why, of course I can't," she said. "Who's going to do the work?"

And Celia was forced to rescind her offer, saying, in her own fluent way, that she found her sister had an engagement for that afternoon.

Ladies resident in Clyde, hearing that Mrs. Ramsay was lying ill at the Winterbournes', called in due form to ask for her and tender help. They were darling ladies, of a kind almost gone out now except in the illustrations of artists who don't know how to do them, and rely on guesses at a period that, to their young eyes, might as well be known at once as the dark ages. They had every accompaniment of a gentler, quainter village civilization but the crinoline. Clyde was a place where, though fashion was accurately copied among the class that had every opportunity and desire to be a smart set, you could wear what clothes you pleased.

Except in the smart set, which might have been better known as the flaunting annuals of the garden, changes in deference to fashion were unheard of. The votaries of constancy would as soon have thought of altering the style of their sleeves because some French minion had decreed it, as they would of levelling a gambrel roof to a flat one, to suit the season. They bought the best material, these dear ladies, and had it made up according to a style that had pleased once and kept its vogue through worth. Dolmans had been graceful and genteel. In Clyde, dolmans never went out. There was in every sewing-room great accumulation of narrow black velvet ribbon, wide silk fringe, and something known as lutestring. With lutestring Lovell's mind had intimate connection. He used, in his poet days, to hear his mother talk of it, and it gave him a thrill, a response to the time of spinets and ringlets, that was never to be lost to him. So softly-stepping ladies barred with parallels of velvet ribbon and tangled with fringe, the only thing about them capable of enmeshing, came in their low-heeled shoes to the Winterbournes' door, and often they brought jelly and delicate *blanc mange*, made from the moss itself, no grocer's instantaneous substitute. Celia was always delighted to receive them, and they spoke of her afterwards as very pleasing. One of them—it was the wife of the old minister who had died that year, an ancient lady cut out of ivory, all yellow tones in face and hair—said to her, "My dear, I hear you have a beautiful voice. Young Dwight Hunter told me so. He was seeing to my cistern. We've had quite a time getting it cleaned out."

It was her sister, Celia brightly conceded. She was ready to sing in public, to women's clubs especially. And at that instant, to her mortification, Bess came in, just pushing down her sleeves and warm from kitchen work.

The minister's wife, through the habit of a long life when she was first lady of the town, had no hesitations. She looked kindly at Bess, and asked, "So you're the one, my dear? you're the one that sings. I wish you'd sing something to me now."

Celia felt one of her moments of despair. Bess, she knew, had her mind on making breadcake and saving Lyddy. How should she recall even the words of the songs she had been so painstakingly taught? But Bess just sat down opposite the minister's wife, dropped her hands in her lap, — those dear plump hands like mothers' hands, that looked sometimes, so great was the surge and stress they lived in, as if soapsuds had wilfully boiled them, — smiled at the minister's wife and asked, "Should you like a hymn?"

"We've no piano here — yet," Celia was beginning; but Bess had evidently determined that this was her venture.

She sang three hymns, and the minister's wife cried.

"You have a great gift, my dear," she said, as she rose to go. "I mustn't keep you now from your invalids, but I hope to see your gift made much of. I hope to live to see you singing in church."

To sing in clubs and concert-halls did not much affect the minister's wife and the other ladies of her color who preserved the dear traditions of Clyde. They, too, went to the meetings of the Woman's Club founded by the annual bed, and relished every word, these hardy perennials, with an unction the annuals could hardly guess, for it had in it the savor of, "It sounds as if it must be so, but, dear us! what are we coming to!" Yet all the strife of factions and the reaching out for better things went on without them, as a comet may whisk by the ordered stars. They really lived in their world of old remembrance, and after the surge and dash of club meeting, they melted softly back to its repose. But the

minister's wife lost no time in telling her intimates among the perennials how beautifully Bess had sung, and a stream of wilfully ancient-seeming ladies directed itself, day by day, to the house, and as regular as their admission was the understanding that Bess should sing to them. For the first time Celia, to her perfect amazement, saw her sister delighting in her voice and unrestrained in using it. She could not, it seemed, be tired in this incidental homely sharing of her gift. Old ladies loved her, and the news got round, and the annuals in their silken petals came flaunting in, and frightened her and she was dumb. To Celia, the world was upside down.

But something else came of all this. The waves of Mrs. Ramsay's illness threw up other treasure on the shore. When John Winterbourne had come back, three years before, to live in his house, there had been a waft of curiosity and interest. Men and women who had known him a little in his youth, or been the intimates of his father and mother, came to call; but he never returned the visits. He was immersed, they found, in his book, and he seemed to show them out with haste, not surprising, because they hoped they knew the ways of scholars. And he had taken to an intimacy with James Trenton Lovell, and this also was fitting, because James was a scholar and a poet, too, though debarred, poor fellow! by his infirmity from entering into the village life. But now it became known through the lively interest in perennials and annuals that there were at Winterbourne's (this in another language, that of the young men who went to town daily) two stunning girls, and it was to be hoped, when the illness in the family was over, that the town would see more of them.

Celia was in evidence. She often walked abroad, clad in gowns that commended themselves almost holily to the feminine eye that knew how to distinguish what when it

becomes what, though the young men thought she must be a particularly nice girl because she dressed so simply. She was really pretty, too, they decided, for her beauty spoke for itself without adorning; and at this their sisters laughed aloud and lost no time in enlightening them on the money and genius that go into clothes wonderfully conceived and simply made.

These things that were going on below stairs, Catherine did not guess. She was thinking how incredible a thing it is that man who has once loved us should not love us again, and whether she had, as mistress of the house, any duty to Mrs. Ramsay as a guest, and whether the moral obliquity in Celia was straightening out. She and Mrs. Ramsay, each knowing the other had become derelict, had, each for the other, a terrified distaste. Far from wanting to talk over their ills, they chose not to hear the mention of the other's name. Each, an altruist, insisted upon reigning absolute and egotistical in the kingdom of rest. This was nature's ironic joke. "You can't get the better of me," the great jovial mother was saying to them. "Broke my rules, did you? See how you like my reactions."

But to Mrs. Ramsay lying this morning in her luxury of nothingness, came a sound, and perhaps because the mental part of her had gone so completely to sleep and nothing was left but the human creature that holds the strings of actual life, the sound went straight to the core of Mrs. Ramsay, who had, though she ignored them as soon as she could rise to address a meeting, given birth to beautiful children. It was the cry of Tony. He had followed on after Winterbourne, at first and as long as he could compass it, with his man's stride, and then, when Winterbourne seemed in danger of getting out of sight, with the dog-trot of the little boy afraid he will be lost. For Tony, though he was not the least of

Mrs. Ramsay's children, was not much used to going out alone. They always made their raids as a clan, this family, and when, a quarter of a mile away from home, the world-loneliness suddenly came upon them, there was always Tonty to become mother, by a swift transformation. No matter what Tonty was, a pirate or a redskin, you had only to call on the maternal in her, and there was she beside each flagging one to take a hand or even administer the rebuke which is in itself so heartening, — because if you thought you were going to be killed in a few minutes by a tiger or a ghost, of course you could n't be cross to your little brother. You 'd be going to see God almost the next instant, and you 'd be afraid.

But now, Tony, alone, unsupported by his clan, was out of breath and heart. Suddenly he was all baby, and his legs, as he called on them, hatefully shortened. His throat hurt him, and he was in a rage with Winterbourne, who would n't turn round and see him, and ask where he was going. Then he could answer, as man to man, "Oh, I thought I'd go over to your house," and Winterbourne might, in a kind of rough-and-tumble wherein there was no offence to dignity, toss him up to his shoulder and carry him the rest of the way. But Winterbourne never looked behind. He strode up the path to his own door, threw open the screen with one motion, and disappeared. Tony also, in due time, went up the path and banged at the screen. No one came. He flattened his little nose on the wires and looked in. The hall was large and still. There were broad stairs. He remembered climbing them that other day to see somebody in bed. Then — for Tony was clever — he considered that it might be possible to open the door another way. So he reached up to the handle and pulled it toward him, and once it banged away from him and caught the ends of two fingers when it shut. Rising

passion, of his hurt fingers, of his lonely soul, was pent in him until he had tugged it open once more and got round the edge of it. There he let it go, and it returned upon him, shamefully slapping him, and Tony fell upon the floor of the great still hall and cried aloud, since his warfare was over, to all that had deserted him.

This Mrs. Ramsay, enisled in peace, heard; it called to her and her alone as, it might be, there were no other woman in the universe. She whipped out of bed and down the stairs, barefooted, and swooped upon the wreck of a dirty little boy on the point, if indications were correct, of being deafened by his own roars and drowned in his own tears. She snatched him up and, hand over his mouth, fled with him to her chamber. There she set him on the floor, and Tony, red with grief and suffocation, could keep silence very well now without the restraining hand. He had been shocked into dumbness. He was afraid to cry. Mrs. Ramsay fell upon his tier and tore it from him. She skinned him as neatly as a mother more used to homely parts. Vain peeling! he was just as dirty underneath. His little bare feet were dusty only. His clothes were sights. Not this a child to be taken into bed with a clean mother, however instinct yearned for him. But Mrs. Ramsay was really a great woman, a captain in emergency. She snatched a pillow from the chair and reft its case off. She sat down and lifted Tony to her knee, and there she pulled the pillow-case deftly to his shoulder blades. He was in a sleeping-bag, frightened to death but still securely there, warranted to leave the cleanest sheets inviolate. And then, before he could do much more than wonder whether it was a nice game and he might laugh, she had slipped into bed with him, and he was scientifically cuddled in her arms.

For an instant Tony thought it was force, and the man in him rebelled. Then two lips touched his hot, tear-wet

cheek. That made him consider a moment, and while he was reflecting, his tired legs stretched themselves a little in their cramping pillow-case, and each of them succumbed to a sensation like drawing a long breath. He caught a sobbing breath himself, and then another, and when Bess came in, in half an hour or so, she found Mrs. Ramsay snuggling a sleeping Tony to her breast and watching the door with warning eyes.

“Hush !” said Mrs. Ramsay. “He’s a tired baby.”

XXVII

WINTERBOURNE was wandering in the early evening, as he loved to do. The question of his complex family would not down. Back and forth in the country road he walked, with a look now and then at the stars. He had his favorites among the constellations. Orion was the boy, he was wont to say, that kept you special company, he flashed there so steadfastly in that brave line of belt and sword. But there was nothing illuminative in him to-night. Winterbourne thought of Lovell, and their broken companionship, and started off toward the little house to find him. It had not been by intention that their common interests had failed. Events had been too fussy and insistent, and come between them. He scarcely saw Lovell now, from day's end to day's end. He had a confused and scornful feeling that the chap was following some girl's petticoat, Celia's, he believed, though Celia was so far out of his scheme of things compelling that he could hardly conceive of her luring with any direct light. A moment he stopped outside Lovell's window and watched the light burning steadily there. A peace, the memory of old beloved occupations, fell upon him with the unconscious signal of the lamp. He knew what Lovell was doing, bending over his Greek, laboriously putting it into very good English. Lovell had not his own long-continued practice; he waded heavily at times, but when he got to the English transcript he was sometimes winged. Winterbourne opened the door and walked in.

The picture was somewhat as he had conceived. Lovell

sat at the table, forehead upon his hand and the other hand stationary, its pencil upon a doubtful point on a sheet of drawing-paper. Winterbourne glowed a little at the thought that he had come upon the dot. Lovell needed him to clear the way. He threw down his hat, set his stick in the corner and drew up his chair.

"Hard at it?" he inquired.

Lovell had glanced at him at the opening of the door, and given him a nod of greeting.

"I'm glad you've come, Winterbourne." He said it absently.

"Ay," returned Winterbourne, in a queer old-fashioned way he had sometimes, of speaking out of books. Perhaps he remembered, in some secret corner of him, that his mother had been Scotch. "What is it, lad?"

"It's this confounded chimney."

"Chimney, lad?" Winterbourne had expected to hear some purist's question over readings.

"Yes, this chimney. The furnace-pipe goes into this flue, and of course that cuts us out of a fire in the dining-room. Well, you want a fire in the dining-room more than you want it in any other room in the house."

"The dining-room?" Winterbourne repeated. "Jim, what have ye there?"

Lovell explained, with some impatience. It appeared to his submerged mind that anybody would have known why he was working on chimneys.

"The east chimney," he repeated. His hair hung over his forehead and clung dankly. He looked harassed and yet most happily alert. "At the house."

"Oh, your big house. Going to let it?"

"No, I'm not going to let it. I'm going —" He stopped there and laughed a little. Celia was not ready, he had

remembered. So far, it was the secret of her maiden diffidence.

But Winterbourne had lost even the perfunctory interest that had prompted him to question. He drew back his chair to the cold hearth and stretched out his legs for thought. He saw no reason why Lovell should not occupy his outer mind with chimneys, the while the inner one concerned itself with questions that are of the only real import to breathing man.

"Lovell," said he, "I've been thinking to-day that the things our brains set themselves upon will be swept away. When the brain dies, the records we've been gravings on her will crumble with her."

"Undoubtedly," said Lovell. But while he said it he was making marks.

Winterbourne, if he had not become entirely absorbed in his own thought, would have known he dreamed of chimneys.

"So what do we want to love our dear pursuits so much for?" he inquired of Lovell and the world of atoms in the listening room. "We want to read Greek because it gives us the keenest pleasure we've yet known. We want to escape the man or woman that keeps us from our book, because we love our book. But when our brain dies, the memory of our book will be dead, too. Won't it? Or do ye think it won't? Is the brain the tool? Does it make something the soul can keep?"

Lovell said nothing, but Winterbourne had ceased to need response. He had embarked.

"So what lives, man? It's what's been kind. It's what has helped some other heart to live. And we do want to live."

"Yes," said Lovell, out of his consideration of a niche for a sideboard, "we want to live."

"We want to see other planets. We want to spin across the void and find worlds making. Yet I'm blest if I'd choose to be any nearer the stars than I am now. I don't like my coat-tails singed; but that's not it. I want them to be far enough away to keep that trumpery jewelled look of being put up for us to think they're there for us, and feed our conceit on it. But we want to live, Jim. I did n't use to know we did. I've even thought within a year, I could die, grateful for it all, and be glad of nothingness. But I can't. And if I mean to live, I'm bound to feed the only part of me that's got any show at all. Not my brain, Jim. That's not got a show. Not a sign of it."

"No," said Lovell, from his housebuilding study. "That's a fact."

"I don't despise the man that tries to live so he won't go to hell," mused Winterbourne. "My old Scotch uncle used to say the only body that was n't afraid of hell was the one that had n't been there. So I think, Jim, my boy, if it's my brain that's my stumbling-block, if it's because I want to read my book in peace that I'm tempted to get rid of whatever stands in my way, why, then—" and a familiar phrase came to him, and he never paused to see the grotesqueness of it here—"why, then, I must cut it off and cast it from me."

After that he sat in silence and smoked, and Lovell made calculations, and neither had a word more for the other until the moment of parting, when Winterbourne, with a "Good-night to ye," took his hat and stick and went forth. Yet they had had excellent communion in the way of silent folk who like the presence of their kind. Lovell breathed a little faster for a moment after he had gone, sitting there, with pencil poised, weighing his new destiny. He would have said there were rhapsodies in him to pour out to Win-

terbourne alone, who knew the sound of the song of life in books or from the lips of man. But the poet had "no speech nor language." He had gone back into the "glory and the dream" where all things are made new, all of them inevitable, all taking their orbits with a rush. And the only thing he could make articulate even to himself was that he must have a clear dining-room flue.

Winterbourne strode off up the road; but when he reached his own house, he could not enter. Houses constrained him. In the night, outside walls, he felt himself wild and glad, and a nature that got no full chance to speak in the prescribed intercourse of men, talked freely with unseen presences. Winterbourne had always, even through his youth and the hard work of his business life, held to that sense of the larger quest which poets only keep alive in us. He had no defined religion. A creed made him blasphemous with the childishness of vain repetition. But the core of him was a passionate belief. He knew there was a reality that answered to these shows of things, and in the night it almost spoke to him. "Thou wilt call and I shall answer Thee," his soul said then. He almost heard the call. It seemed to be telling him now that there was a thing to do touching the muddle he had made of his own life, — not a way out of it but a way to answer the call while he stayed in it. It said beyond question, the voice, that he could never go back to his care-free existence in a slipshod house that he hardly saw with his bodily eyes because the Greeks were all about him. The house was swept and garnished, and old ladies of Clyde were daily filing through it. He had his own sufficient solitude; but that was not it. The atmosphere of calm outside him had been invaded. Before he had felt the stillness and forgetfulness of his kind to extend through the town — because, as soon as the event of

his homecoming was over Clyde had ceased to think of him — to the sea it extended, and the confines of the world. And now he was in it again, life as busy as a hive, and Catherine looked to him as her own special god, and he was really the special god of Bess, he knew, and bound to save her before her youth and bloom were gone.

He walked on over the bridge, pausing there as one always has to at dark water for a searching of its mystery, — for by night the shallowest of it may be any depth and rich in glints of stars, — and then on to Hunter's where, late though it was, there was a light in the barn as there had been on the night Bess went there, and Hunter, the color in his face, was at work like a young artisan who has his bread to win. He looked up as Winterbourne's foot struck the barn run, and threw down his tool. More red ran into his skin and he started forward. Did he think because she had come there once that she would come again? But Winterbourne's bulk approached, and Dwight took up his tool.

"Oh, it's you," he said, in man's tone to man. Who could say, while he worked, what graces had been circling round him, calling him to take hands for the lovely dance of life?

"What are you doing?" Winterbourne queried. "What do you do it for?"

It seemed to him that Dwight, being free, might sit at this moment at a table with a book.

"It's the prettiest bit of inlaying I've come across," said Dwight. He held his lamp to the curving edge. "A side-board, don't you see? It's going between the two windows."

"Where?" asked Winterbourne, to show a decent interest.

"Why, in the dining-room, man, of course." He fell to

work again, and Winterbourne, with a sense that he had been hearing about dining-rooms before that night, stood still and watched him. Suddenly Dwight came upright, tool in hand, and looked at him heatedly. "Can't you do anything to keep her from killing herself?" he inquired.

Winterbourne stared at him in good faith.

"What do you go round adopting girls for," Dwight continued bitterly, as if to lash him into a decent sense of responsibility, "if you're not going to take care of 'em after you've got 'em?"

"Do you mean Bess?" Winterbourne inquired humbly. The context made it evident he could not mean Celia.

"I do. I mean Bess."

"I agree with you. She's being killed."

"Then why don't you prevent it, man? Why don't you prevent it?"

The sick passion of the tone roused Winterbourne.

"You like her, boy?" he said kindly.

"Like her!" The misery of his voice and look told how wholly he had succumbed to the delirium of it.

Winterbourne straightened.

"Then I'll tell you," he said, "you can't have her."

"Can't have her?"

"No. She's too damned precious."

"For me?"

"For any man in this world gone wrong, where nature drives us mad and we long for a woman and we make her love us and we tire of her."

"You think I'll tire of her?"

"You're a man. You're like the rest of us."

The smile on Hunter's lips told that he, at least, was not like the rest; but he put it differently.

"She's not like the rest."

"No, she's not. She's fit for heroes."

Dwight stood staring straight in front of him, a rapt look on his face. He was no hero. He was doing over furniture. But he felt himself the size of heroes. He recalled himself to Winterbourne.

"So you're not with me," he said briefly.

"You must do as you will," said Winterbourne. "She's not my child, though you say I've adopted her."

"She adores you." This came bitterly.

Winterbourne lifted his head an inch, and his lips smiled.

"Thank God!" he said. "I have n't missed everything."

He turned and walked away out of the barn, but in a moment he was back. Dwight stood as he had left him.

"Dwight," he said, "we're not in our right minds. It's come over us too suddenly. Get her if you can. But be good to her. Don't stop loving her. My God! why have we got to stop loving them, and why can't they stop loving us? I tell you what it is, Dwight, don't give up reading the poets. There. Good-night. Get her if you can."

When he was home again, he halted under his wife's window, and saw Bess moving back and forth against it, and asked himself how it would seem to be young again and the lover of a girl. He knew well how it would seem. But he took off his hat and stood there a moment, and the passion in him was a prayer that she might find the passion of love enduring.

XXVIII

IT was next morning that Winterbourne and Bess stood talking for a moment in the garden by the gate. She was looking for Tonty, due to make her daily call, and telling him about the ravishment of Tony and his pillow-slip eclipse, and how Mrs. Ramsay, when the time came for the awakening and the man-child roaring for his supper, would hardly be parted from him.

"Then she's a human woman," said Winterbourne grudgingly. He never saw Mrs. Ramsay as a normal being. "She has a passion for her young."

"It will do her good, I guess," Bess sagely told him. "She seemed worried because he was so dirty. I told her nothing could be done with so little help at home."

Dwight Hunter came in sight now, on his big team, driving slowly because he had birch-wood for a perennial lady "down the road." Bess ran out and waited for him, and Dwight stopped, took off his cap and jumped down to speak, all a rapt listening, if perhaps he could in some way serve her. It seemed to him he had made a step or two toward her favor, since the day she struck him in the shed-chamber; but that he now humbly knew, although it was not conventional, he had won for himself by his savage haste.

"Remember," she said, "it's the club to-night. The boys."

"Oh, yes," he told her fervently, "I'll be there."

"I shan't go to-night," said Bess. "You need n't tell them so, but I may not go any more. You can teach them things, and I can't do anything but sing with 'em."

He stared at her, aghast. Was this the end of his diplomacy?

"Why, they won't sing for me," he argued. Dwight almost felt there were tears in his voice. "They won't even stay the evening out. You've got to go."

"Oh, yes, they'll stay," Bess assured him, out of her sage calm. "They won't dare not to. Their fathers work for you. I'm too busy. I'm awfully glad to have you take it off my hands."

She gave him a little kindly smile and left him. The smile told him she was perfectly certain of his moving interest in boys with singing voices, and he tried feebly to respond. But he stepped sorrowfully on his load again and drove away. What, he wondered, had Winterbourne to do with it?

"That," said Winterbourne to her as she came back, "is the King of Clyde." She looked at him for the reason. "He's the only live man here. All the other live men go into the city to earn money. They take their brains out of Clyde. The deader it is, the better they like it; it's quieter to come back to."

"Why does n't he go?" Bess inquired. It seemed as if she thought it better that he should.

"I'm going to tell you, Bess. Three years ago when I came back here, he asked my advice. He was a good deal with Lovell, and I fell in with Lovell because of the Greek. He asked my advice because I was older. You know, kid, your daddy's very old."

"You're not," she denied, with indignation. "You're just like any of us."

"Oh, no, I'm not. My name is Tithonus. Any grasshopper'll tell you. Well, Hunter's father had died. He was a rich man, a contractor, a man in politics in the city. They

kept this for a summer place. Dwight was expected to go in with his father. He'd been with him a year or so, and he'd found out how his father's contracts were got, how he'd played into the hands of the politicians and they'd played into his. Well, at first Dwight could n't do anything about it but look into it. His father was a sick man. Then he died, and the boy found he was at a good deal of a disadvantage. He could n't well carry on business at the old stand without playing the old game. The firm was pretty well known. And the other sort knew it, too, the ones that wanted to play fair. So he elected to throw up the job there, and build up something in Clyde."

"Yes," said she, "of course he'd have to."

Winterbourne rather expected to hear Dwight acclaimed a hero, but an indication of bare honesty was evidently no more than she expected of every man.

"But he'd better go into the city," she said reprovingly, as if Winterbourne had made him an exile. "Not stay in his barn every night doing over old furniture."

"Don't you like to have him do over furniture?" he inquired meekly. He felt as if she were the mother of men, with the secrets of life in her apron-pocket.

"Men that have got to live in the world can't put aside seeing folks," she answered briefly. "He'd better hunt up the young men he was in college with, or folks as good as he is. If he just sees the men here that are doing day's works, he'll get to think that's all there is."

"All there is, sapient one?"

Bess had a suspicion that he was laughing at her, but she never cared, when it was he.

"He'll get to think he knows it all," she explained. "He's pretty young."

"He's older than you are, ninnyhammer, a good two

years." She ignored that even by an eyebeam, with an implication that this was beside the question. "How about your consorting with Lyddy and me and doing housework?" he pursued. "How about your deteriorating, Missy? Bess, I'm going to tell you something. Your only salvation is to go away from here, and I'm going to send you. Your daddy's going to send you."

She looked at him in a questioning apprehension.

"Oh, no, sir," she said. "I just could n't go."

"Why could n't you?"

"I could n't go away from you."

It was the most innocent avowal, and the clarity of it brought tears to his eyes.

"Imbecile!" he threw at her. "Kids have to leave their fathers. They have to go away and learn to sing and rest their backs and use good English, too, — you say some frightful things, blockhead."

She was watching him with an anxious wistfulness.

"I think I get along with my Italian. Don't you think so?" she inquired. For she had incredibly found a half-hour here, an hour there, and though she was often sleepy from her tasks, she did absorb amazingly.

"What good is your Italian going to do you, young sport, if you don't go anywhere to show it off? Of course I'd rather you'd be here. I'd rather you'd settle in a house in Clyde, where I could go in of an evening and rest my old bones. But if you don't marry somebody in Clyde, off you go."

Bess laughed. She knew the tempestuous indignations of him, the outcry that meant very little wool indeed. She went off down the road to meet Tonty, who had been signalled, and Winterbourne strode back through the kitchen for a morning call he meant to make his wife. In the kitchen Lyddy took her hands out of the dish-pan and hailed him.

"You sit down here a minute," she said, with the curtness which clothed fealty, "an' see if you can tell me what this is. I can't find my other spe'tacles."

She had no glasses but the ones that glittered now upon her. This Winterbourne knew, but he fancied Lyddy had long ago given up the accomplishment known as reading handwriting as one of the graces so little to be needed in another state of existence that it might as well be dropped now. She handed him from her deepest pocket a wayworn letter, and he opened it and read. It was from the previously hostile Ann, and abounded, short as it was, in professions of piety. Its purport was that, having religion herself, she wanted Lyddy to know it and to be assured that they were to meet in the harbor of heaven. And she was sorry for what was past and gone, and would Lyddy tell Mr. Winterbourne how much she thanked him for mother's ear-trumpet that she gave to the young lady in the kitchen.

"Of all the sassy jades!" Lyddy commented sufficiently. "Meet me above! well, I guess when we meet, 't will be somewheres else. All she means is, she's afraid I'll remember I own half that house, an' she thinks I'll move in. Mebbe I will, to spite her."

Winterbourne went on to make his wife the morning call, but in the sitting-room, face to face, he met her. Catherine had on a pretty floating dress. She was pale, and her eyes sought his apprehensively, as if, though wonder was in her as to the amount she could do, she was determined to show her will. For an instant Winterbourne forgot she was an invalid unlawfully out of bed.

"Hallo," said he. "I was going up to see you."

"I thought I'd come down and ask whether we could n't have a little walk," she said.

"And come home as we did the other day, pick-a-back?"

No, Cat. I don't take you far from home until you're on your pins again. But you can get as far as the garden, can't you? There's the arbor."

He gave her his arm, and she went with him through the kitchen, where Lyddy would not look at her, but sniffed brazenly when she was bidden good-morning, though she immediately conceded a reply on Winterbourne's ominous pause. In the arbor, lying in a long chair with the grape-leaves shading her, Catherine was glad within that she had not been forced to go farther for his company.

"Kitty," said Winterbourne, "do you think you're able to talk a little business?"

She would undertake anything, her grateful glance told him, so he would call her by some small name.

"When you said you'd lost money," he ventured, watching her to see how she might receive it, "did you mean what you said exactly? Was it all you had?"

Her eyes widened in their look of terror.

"O John," she said, "it was all I had. And Celia needs things now, and so do I."

"Ah!" He said it meditatively, and seemed to retire behind his beard. Then he remembered she was ill, and warranted to faint at any point, and smiled at her. "Well, well," he qualified, "we must do the best we can."

Celia at that moment appeared in the doorway, and Tim Ramsay's golden head rose over her shoulder. They, too, were bound for the arbor, but seeing it occupied, Celia smiled, and with a hand-wave turned back into the house. She was pale. Her eyes had shadows under them. At that moment she was no longer girl, but woman.

"What does she want with that yellow-headed loon?" Winterbourne said, frowning. "I'd dress him in petticoats and give him a seam to sew. If he's going to be a man, he'd

better be put into Dwight Hunter's gang and work on the road."

The side door swung behind them, as he spoke, and Tim and Celia took the path through the lane to the Valley of Birds.

"Don't you like him?" Catherine was asking. "Don't you think he's nice for the girls to be with?"

"Nice! Sugar and cream, that's all he is. But Celia won't mind. She'll say he's dear and lovely, if you ask her. I dare say she thinks so, too. She's garbled her adjectives so long she can't tell what they mean."

"John," said his wife, "I don't think you like Celia."

"I don't know her. I don't know the real Celia. I don't believe Celia does."

He was talking to her with plain honesty, for he had concluded that if he and Catherine were to join their fortunes, as the upper gods seemed to indicate, it must be as business partners, on the square. This was prudential, too. He could coddle her while she was sick. In a time of her need, he could play a game with her, but heart and flesh would fail him if he were to continue it.

"Celia's got an idea it's attractive to find everything darling and dear and sweet. It's all her damned vanity. She wants to be the princess that had jewels drop out of her mouth. Well, she's earned her own punishment, and she never knows now whether she likes or hates. She talks a jargon of affection. Maybe she feels it, but more likely it poisons her. Reaction, Catherine, that's what it is. What we call punishments are reactions. She's littered her standards up, and I don't believe she can pick out evil from good."

Catherine was enormously taken with this. It was the kind of talk she had always hoped he would respect her enough to share with her.

"I don't know what you mean by her vanity," she ventured, wishing she might sound as intellectual to him as he did to her. "Celia does n't seem to me vain."

"That's it. She's too vain to appear vain. She's got a theory of the way she ought to act, and she's going to act just that way if the bottom drops out. If I could hear Celia swear once —"

"John!"

"If she said to me just once, 'You're a doddering old fool, and your beard's untidy, and I hate you,' I could say, 'Good for you, Celia. You're half worthy to be your sister's sister.'"

"You don't call Bess vain." There was the old haunting note of jealousy.

"Bess! don't you talk about Bess. She's your nurse, and she's broken her back for you. And she's my wife's nurse and broken her back for the whole of us. No, we can't talk about Bess."

It was safer, even she saw, to talk about Celia.

"Don't you find Celia cheerful?" she inquired.

"No, not what I call cheerful. I don't call a perfunctory twitter cheerful. By the Lord, Kit, that's why I don't like her. She's no sense of humor."

"Has Bess?" Again the tone he chafed under. "She does n't laugh much, either."

"No, Bess does n't laugh much. Maybe she has n't time." He thought a minute, with a sudden vision of her as he saw her a week ago, standing under an apple tree in a gleeful transport while Hunter from above passed her down Tony, who had got stranded there. "Yes, I guess Bess would laugh more if she had time. She could n't be on the terms she is with the old earth and not see her ironies. But I can tell you why Celia can't laugh. She's so busy scheming out what

it's pretty to think and feel, she would n't dare take off her hat to an irony. It might not be the irony other folks took off theirs to."

"John," his wife whispered it in her caution, "do you ever see any sign of her saying — what is n't so?"

"No, Kit, no." He shook his head decisively. He was not going to be found in that form of espial. Involuntary ones were enough. "I don't have many words with her."

But all the time, while his tongue was continuing this rather acrid chattering, he was thinking of the money she had lost and the money he had n't earned, and wondering what they were to live on. There was plenty for the present. His part of the property was intact, but he knew something about his wife's exquisite needs as they used to be, and he had no hope that a sumptuous Celia's could be less. And Bess, in spite of herself, was to have the riches of the world: travel, lessons, leisure to fold her dear plump hands and listen to the love-making a prince was probably conning now, in a palace garden, till she should come.

Lyddy stepped to the door and tossed out a bee she had captured in a towel. Lyddy was queer: she would scarify human creatures, but she could never let a dumb thing suffer hurt. The sight of her was like a call to Winterbourne, like a key to complete a circuit with his brain. He jumped, and Catherine jumped with him.

"By Jove!" said he, "my pan-pipes."

"What is it, John?"

He laughed in pleasure at his cleverness.

"Don't you fret, old lady. I'll patent pan-pipes. There's nothing like them. It's a simple job."

He sat there uneasily for ten minutes or so, and she could not keep him. Impatience was upon him to find his pan-pipes and be gone, perhaps to Lovell to ask him if the idea

were really feasible, since Lovell had told him he was a fool not to do it; perhaps to take the thing apart and see if some more cunning channel could be devised. Catherine had lost his attention, and she grew straightway tired. When she rose, he got instantly on his feet.

"Going in?" said he. "Come on, then. I've got to find something in there."

Celia on the way down through the lane looked at Tim casually. He was moody, and he had no talk to proffer. Even his answers had a sulky tinge.

"How is it?" asked Celia.

"What?"

"How are the pan-pipes?"

"Blast the pan-pipes!"

Celia looked at him in delicate reproof. Yet her eyes were curious.

"Things are n't going well?" she guessed.

"Things would go well if old Gregory would do as I asked him. What's a man want to go into a thing for and then light out and say no more about it?"

"Gregory?"

"Yes. I've been up to town twice to find him, and they say he has n't been to the office more than half an hour a day for a month."

"What does your father say?"

"Dad? He's so surprised he acts as if he was drunk. He's taking charge and Gregory's raised his salary."

"Why don't you write?"

"Can't. Dad opens the letters."

"Oh, but you should tell your father."

"Not much! He'd give the whole thing away to Winterbourne. Dad's no sport."

"But where *is* Gregory?"

Tim looked gloomily into the grove they were approaching.

"That's it. Maybe he's gone on to Washington. Maybe he's forming a company. I tell you I've let Gregory in for something good, and he's playing fast and loose with me. And I can't get my hand on the other trumpet. Ann Staples'll just as likely as not wait a year before she brings it back. You can't tell anything about those people. They say they're going to do a thing and then they don't do it."

They had reached the grove, and Celia sat down with a graceful calm, and Tim roamed back and forth and flung his hands about and scowled.

"Come here," said she.

He came, and stood before her, not scowling now, she was so pretty. She was opening her little silk bag, and he watched her with no more than the interest you accord a creature who does everything charmingly but in whose present deed you have no concern. But she spread the bag wider and drew out something black and queer: pan-pipes.

Celia sat looking at him. Tim whitened under his pink at the surprise of it and the simplicity.

"Where'd you get it?" he asked. "She bring it back?"

Celia nodded.

"Give it to you?"

She nodded again.

"Anybody else round?"

"No."

"Bully! you got it for me?"

Something more assertive swelled his port, and he seemed less like Tim who was good to play with than a man as other men. She felt haughty.

"I don't know what I got it for." Here she told the truth. "I got it," she added, "so that the right thing

might be done with it. I didn't want it to fall into the wrong hands."

"Mine are the right hands," Tim chuckled. "Give it to me, quick as a wink, and I never'll forget you the longest day I live. Girls don't care about spoils, or I'd see you have a lot of shares. Honest, I would. I will."

Why had she done it? Celia knew no more than he. His muddled comprehension of what might be done with a miraculous trumpet by the time it reached her was more elastic still. She had an unformulated hope that somehow the possession of it would give her — after Winterbourne of course, to whom the thing belonged — something of the one definite medium that lets you stand upright on your feet and face the world. If the trumpet meant money, it must mean that to her. She put it back into the bag, and Tim's extended hand dropped foolishly.

"Just what did you want of it?" she asked him, with her nicest air.

"I want to patent it." He was answering eagerly, as if, could he satisfy her, she might yield.

"But Mr. Gregory has the other one to patent."

"It's all one. What's the use of splitting hairs. I told you before. I've put the only trumpet I had into Gregory's hands. S'pose he loses his? S'pose he ain't got the right kind of a model made? We want something to fall back on."

But she knew there was more. The real reason was behind, for he had told her. It was to be kept out of Winterbourne's hands, so that when Winterbourne said, "I made this thing," he would have no sign of it to point at. It looked, even to her unpractised mind, like a flimsy web.

"But Mr. Winterbourne could explain how it was made," she objected. "He could draw a plan of it in a minute,

probably. You could n't. You don't know any more about it than I do."

Tim looked sulky. It was his defence.

"That's nothing to do with getting a patent," said he sagely. "You just get the patent. Gregory knows how. Then Winterbourne could whistle. He can't sue us. He's got no money. And when he hears he's down for a double handful of shares, I guess even Winterbourne'll withdraw any suit he's brought. Why, Winterbourne ain't got the sand to stick to anything. He'll get mad, and then he'll get over it, and let his wife pocket the loot. You'll see."

Celia sat thinking, her hand on her silk bag.

"Don't wrinkle up your forehead so," Tim said daringly. "When you do that, you look thirty."

She put up her head and flashed a glance at him. But she released her forehead.

"I think," she said, "I'll keep the trumpet."

Then she rose to go, and Tim in the soreness of disappointed hopes could think of nothing but "Oh, come now!" while he turned with her dejectedly. It was half a game to him. It made him feel experienced, and fed his desire to stand among men and cause them to forget his pinkness. There was daring in it, too. He was going, he thought, to prove himself.

"But I tell you one thing," he said, in his way up the lane, "just one thing. I'm going to Washington."

"What for?"

He did not know what for. He felt he was getting nearer patents so.

"I'm going to ask mother for the money. She won't tell. She can't tell. She could n't remember the word for trumpet to save her soul."

Tim whistled here, and thought the day was fine and the

girl with him was pretty and fortune at his elbow. But Celia continued thoughtful. They reached the house together and he went up the stairs to Mrs. Ramsay. Celia chose to go through the sitting-room, because she could reach the side stairs better, and there sat Catherine resting, and Winterbourne, at his desk, was red with wrath. He had pitched the papers out of a certain drawer, and was pawing them as if the motion were, not to find something, but the product of his indignation.

"Where in all the holes and corners of a universe on its way to blinding torment is my ear-trumpet?" he cried.

Catherine put her hands to her ears, and added her small pipe, —

"John, don't!"

He was in one of his rages over little things. But Winterbourne had carefully explained to her, years ago, that little things were the only ones it was possible to rage over. You could curse if a stream of water hit you in the face. You never could put out your tongue at an avalanche or the sea. There was colossal dignity in mortal things, he hoped he knew, and to them he had to bow. But there was a set of little devils deputed to plague him, and in their presence and the action of their machinations he was not going to keep a caitiff's silence. Bess appeared at the door and he faced her, red of face and bristling.

"I've lost my ear-trumpet!"

She echoed him innocently, —

"Ear-trumpet?"

"Don't repeat my words. I said ear-trumpet. It was in this drawer. It's gone. What infernal woman has been crawling through my drawer?"

"O John!" Catherine's voice came beating in.

Bess advanced, in an unmoved calm.

"Let's see," she said, with a maternal formula. "Are you sure you put it here?"

"Am I sure I put it here? Ye gods, why can't women accept a fact? Sure I put it here? Girl, I tell you I had it here. Take that from me, and say no more."

Winterbourne always got academic when the little imps were after him, and there is no doubt that it did impress the feminine ear. Catherine lay down now on the couch where she had been sitting, as one unable to leave the room while the storm was whistling, and Celia stood with whitened face, an image of calm. She, too, knew she must stay to see which way the wind would blow.

"What does it look like?" innocent Bess inquired.

"Look like? It looks like an ear-trumpet."

"But I never saw an ear-trumpet, daddy." She used the name unthinkingly, and Catherine and Celia stared at her.

"Then it's time you did, if you're all going to run chariot races through my things and lose 'em for me. Why, ninny, it looks like the one you've got."

"The one I've got?"

"Yes, density. The one the woman brought back and gave to you in the kitchen."

"But she did n't," Bess assured him. "I have n't seen any woman with an ear-trumpet in the kitchen. No, Mr. Winterbourne, it is n't here. There's nothing here but papers and pipes and things."

"Then Lyddy's right," Winterbourne declaimed, as if the discovery of the perfidy of all things earthly had plunged him into utter gloom. "She says the Stapleses are the devil's own. The girl lied. Who's that knocking at my door?"

There had been a demanding knock with a stick, evidently on the screen.

"I'll go, in a second." This from Bess, who was hastily stemming the tide of papers falling to the floor.

"Not in here, John," Catherine said faintly. "Don't let me see any one."

"It's some fool of a woman that wants to be sung to," Winterbourne said bitterly out of his new understanding of the frailty of things here below. "Stay here, Bess. I'll go to my own door, and if it's an agent, he shall be hamstrung."

When he was over the threshold, Catherine swung to the door behind him, so that no stranger should, if he gained admittance to the hall, give her the necessity of speech. Bess had stopped short in picking up the papers. She remembered something. She turned to Celia standing there unmoved, her silk bag in one hand, the other hand upon her dress, as if in another instant she might lift her skirt and run like Atalanta.

"Celia," said Bess, "that was n't the woman that night?"

"What night?" Celia asked, in a hard monotony of tone. Her eyes looked warningly at her sister. "Don't speak," they said. "Don't speak."

But Bess ignored the message. Perhaps it never reached her.

"The night the woman came and gave you a package when I was out of the room and you said it was the milkman's wife. I forgot to tell you I asked the milkman next morning what she wanted and he has n't any wife, Celia. And I meant to tell you. I thought it was a joke. I meant—"

Her voice trailed off from its unconcern into understanding, into terror. Her face suddenly lost its rose, and with thin white cheeks they looked at last alike, except that Celia's pallor was that of anger and hers was that of fear. Catherine's eyes were on Celia only.

"O Celia," she said, in her intense undertone. "Was that it? Did you tell her what — was n't true?"

Celia turned her blazing eyes away from her sister's face. She could answer Catherine.

"You are absurd," she said. "Yes, it was a joke. Of course it was a joke."

Then she walked out of the room. They heard her pause a moment on the stairs, — it might have been in trembling or the intention to return; but she went on, and then Catherine began to cry weakly.

"O Bess, how dreadful it is, how dreadful she can be!"

Bess had gone on putting the papers back into the drawer. She had an air of preoccupation only. Her mind had withdrawn to its inner workroom to collect itself and judge, — match little piece to piece.

"I'll get you something to take in a minute," she said absently. "As soon as Mr. Winterbourne's caller has gone, you'd better run upstairs."

"It is n't true," Catherine was insisting. "She had the look she always has when she says what is n't true. But what object could she have, Bess, what object? That's what makes it so terrible. She's got to the point where it's ingrain. She says things without an object."

"She told you," Bess reminded her. The color had not come back to her face. She looked stony with pain. "She said it was a joke."

"It is n't a joke. John says she's no sense of humor. It was the other thing. O Bess, it seems as if I could die if I could keep her from doing that."

"I could die, too," the girl's inner self responded, but her lips answered, "The caller has gone. Mr. Winterbourne has gone with him. Now you can run up to bed."

Winterbourne, going to the door, had found there, on the other side of the screen, a short globular man, dressed faultlessly in a light gray summer suit, with correct tie and

every evidence that he prized the toilet even in its lesser niceties. He took off his hat ceremoniously and showed that he was bald save for a little curling wisp, made for comedy, on the top of his poll. His face was pink and shining.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but can you tell me how to find the Valley of Birds?"

No man less likely to seek out a poetic valley had ever entered Winterbourne's ken. He stepped outside and asked unbelievably, —

"Did you say the Valley of Birds?"

Whereupon, at the first indication of his lips to open, the stranger whipped up an ear-trumpet and presented the mouth to Winterbourne. Winterbourne fell back in wild amaze.

"My God, man," he bellowed, "where did you get my trumpet?"

He had not omitted to speak into it, and the stranger, in his turn, fell back. His spectacled blue eyes popped with an absurd terror. Now Winterbourne remembered that he had a voice of dry, toneless quality, one of the voices of the deaf. He was turning about with a conclusive dignity, in haste, also, as if the outcome of the affair had not been what he hoped.

"I am sorry to have troubled you," said he. "I won't intrude upon you."

But Winterbourne was after him. He arrested him with a hand on his shoulder and violently pulled about the arm that had seemed to be concealing pan-pipes at his side. Winterbourne forced it to the stranger's ear and spoke into it.

"The Valley of Birds," he said, "is down through my lane and through my carrot-field. I'll show it to you."

He finished after pan-pipes had left the stranger's ear. "But that's my trumpet, and I can just as well kill you in the Valley of Birds as here. Better."

Therefore the stranger apprehensively, and Winterbourne with decision, walked off together, and once, on their way through the lane, the stranger caught a bright yellow flash from bough to bough of the elm tree in the neighboring field. He stole a look at Winterbourne, a child's look of guilt, of temptation not to be denied, and whipped out pan-pipes and put it to his ear. He stopped and stood entranced. The oriole sang.

"Ah!" It was acute delight. However he had come upon pan-pipes, Winterbourne forgave him.

XXIX

WHEN they reached the circle of the grove, the little man turned to Winterbourne and asked, yet as if he already knew, —
“Valley of Birds?”

Winterbourne nodded, entirely tamed, whoever had his ear-trumpet, by curiosity. The little man sat down on a bank, his plump legs sticking out, and set the trumpet to his ear. He listened beatifically. Winterbourne also sat, slipped down an incline slightly on the pine-needles, found himself a more commodious hollow adapted to his frame, and watched. The other man had forgotten him. He sat in a rapt communion with sound. And yet there was not so very much sound either. It was getting late for birds. Once he turned the trumpet up into the tree, and his mouth widened. He shook his head in ecstasy, as if to say, “That’s the boy for me,” and Winterbourne wondered whether he could possibly have caught the pother of a squirrel running up and down excitedly, put about, it seemed, by man’s invasion. Winterbourne, brimming with interest and satisfaction, thought he should be content to watch the stranger everlastingly. He had never seen a creature more mysteriously happy. And the trumpet was his own trumpet. There could be no doubt about it. There was even the little irregular dent in the rim, this from the time his mother dropped it on the fender.

Winterbourne had a great many illuminating thoughts. He had never considered that hearing was especially valuable as a factor of happiness to a man over forty. It would

be practically a mistake to lose it, he knew, — but happiness! Was the singing of birds so much to mortal man, when by diving into a book the sea of oblivion to this time could close over him and he could be on Hymettus with the bees? He felt that he had a great deal to think about, while his silent companion was listening. He was learning things about life itself, and this, when he could escape from books, was his game. Suddenly the stranger drew a long, open-mouthed breath of satisfaction. He put down the trumpet and his hand with it on the ground at his side, and shut his eyes tight a minute, as if to rest them from the ecstasy that had been pouring in through all the senses. Then he opened them, — he had sudden ways for so rotund a man, — clapped pan-pipes to his ear, and presented it to Winterbourne.

“My name is Gregory,” said he. “I have n’t had the pleasure of meeting you.”

Winterbourne wanted to know many things far more than he wanted to fulfil the convention of telling his own name.

“How did you hear about the Valley of Birds?” he hastened to inquire.

“Article in the *Sun*,” said Gregory, “signed by a man named Lovell.”

“I told him —” said Winterbourne, meaning to add, “I told him how it would be.” But he cut it short, remembering the ecstasy on his visitor’s face. Did he wish to shut off any creature just born into the delights of sound? “You enjoy it?” he remarked tritely.

Gregory nodded.

“The amount of it was this,” said he. “Since I’ve had my trumpet — this trumpet — I’ve been on a prolonged spree.”

Winterbourne looked at him the more questioningly, his

correct clothes, the freshness of his face. Gregory, accustomed to calling on his eyes to help his ears, read the look and shook his head.

"No, no," said he, "figurative, figurative. I've given up work, that's all. I go to the office an hour every morning. Then I escape, sir, I escape. I take this trumpet and run away. I go to vaudeville; I get into the country. I came down here because that fellow said there were more birds here to the square inch than in any other bit of woods in New England. I'm on the loose. I can hear, man, and I'm going to hear every sound that peeps for fear the thing shuts down again. I haven't heard for thirty-eight years. How I've carried on my business, God only knows. If I had n't a good son and a clerk that's worth his weight in gold, I could n't, that's all. What?"

Winterbourne seemed about to speak, but he hesitated gravely. Could he say to this creature new-born into the world of satisfactions, "Where did you get my trumpet?" Was it not indeed, by the law of equity, Gregory's own trumpet? Winterbourne felt a little awed at himself for inventing such a thing. When his mother used it, he had settled down with great pleasure to her satisfaction in reëntering family intercourse. But here was a sane middle-aged man drunk with delight because he was new-born again into a world worth living in. Winterbourne felt like a creator, in a small way. He wondered, too, how many other brokers, hungry for the song of birds, might have been using it if he had spread it broadcast. Was this another chamber of life he should have entered instead of running off to his own games in the forest of plenty?

"May I see that?" he compromised with curiosity, holding out his hand.

Gregory misunderstood him, wilfully, Winterbourne saw.

He would not let the thing go out of his grasp. He lifted it again and smiled at Winterbourne.

"When I tell you," said he confidentially, "that this is the only trumpet ever invented that doesn't change the human voice, that gives you *Trovatore*, by Jove! as you heard it when you were fifteen — well, I would n't part from it for all the money in the Standard Oil."

Winterbourne dropped his hand. It was Gregory's trumpet, he understood. The gods had given it to him.

"Who owns this place?" Gregory was asking.

"I do."

"Indeed! Let me congratulate you, sir. May I inquire your name?"

"Winterbourne. John Winterbourne."

He was by no means prepared for the effect of this as a facer. What less moving than telling his own unmarked name? But Gregory dropped the trumpet, hid it, Winterbourne saw, in the pocket of his loose coat. With some difficulty he got on his short legs.

"I'll be going," said he.

Now Winterbourne was roused. What did the shade of pallor mean overspreading the rounded cheek? What that gleam of the blue eyes, a moment before so trusting? He also came upon his feet and towered.

"No, you don't," said he. "What is there in my name to set you off? Where did you get that trumpet?"

Gregory was walking, hands in his coat-pockets, — that, Winterbourne knew, to keep a grip of one on pan-pipes, — he was walking off. But Winterbourne was in face of him, a hand rhetorically extended.

"Where," he roared, forgetting that to Gregory without his magic servitor the thunder might be rumbling the same question without avail, "where did you get my trumpet?"

Gregory could not, without the loss of some dignity, continue. He might dodge on the wood-path, but his legs were short and he was no sprinter. The red surged back into his face. He swelled a little with a sudden anger, and plucked the trumpet from his pocket. Again he set it to his ear.

"I thank you, sir," said he stiffly, "for one of the most enjoyable hours of my life. Good-morning."

Winterbourne, without scruple, laid a hand upon his arm and kept the trumpet in its place.

"Where," said he, in the modified tone adapted, he knew, to pan-pipes, "where did you get that trumpet?"

Gregory looked him for more than an instant in the eyes, appraising him. He made his hasty resolution.

"Come," said he. "We might as well talk it over." And it was he who led the way back into the grove, Winterbourne following. Gregory sat down on a tree-trunk this time, and Winterbourne gravely took a place beside him, near, also, judging that the trumpet, in some fashion, might escape him if it were not within reach. Gregory turned to him with a dash of appeal.

"Come, now," said he, "put yourself in my place. I had n't heard a word for thirty-eight years. The minute I put that thing to my ear, I was bewitched. Do you suppose I could let it go out of my hands into a mechanic's, to fiddle with it, to make diagrams and models? He might spoil it. God! you don't expect a man that's been deaf for thirty-eight years to do a thing like that, do you?"

"By Jupiter, no!" Winterbourne understood it all no more than the dead, but Gregory looked as if he were going to cry. He could read the signs of that, and wanted to say to him, "Don't do that. Catherine does that."

"Well!" said Gregory. He was in a measure relieved, but he seemed to be pouring out his grievances at once, the

thirty-eight years he had been shut out from paradise and the ironic chance that brought him a trumpet only to snatch it from him. "Nobody's understood it. Even my wife ain't. 'Why can't you 'tend to your business if you have got an ear-trumpet?' she says; 'why can't you 'tend to it better?' My son don't understand it. It's he and the head clerk that's keeping the house running. My son comes to me, and says, 'Father, can't you give us half a day? You don't need to be off every day, do you?' And I say to him, 'I've given you every day for thirty-eight years and I've written out my orders and it's cost me blood. And now,' says I, 'I can hear. Can't see what that means to a man, can ye? I can hear. And I'm going to hear,' I says, 'every blessed thing that's going.' Why, man, when I wake up now, I can hear my watch tick on the little stand, head o' my bed. First time I heard it, I took it and kissed it. My wife saw me do it, and she says to me, 'Manuel, you crazy?'"

His blue eyes were full of tears. Winterbourne's, too, filled, and he was not ashamed. But he spoke into the trumpet.

"Where did you get the thing? where did you get it?"

Gregory was watching him now, as if to see how he would take it.

"I suppose," he countered, "he's your son."

"Who's my son?"

"His name's Winterbourne."

"Whose name is Winterbourne?"

"But you need n't tell me he invented a thing like that. I thought at first he might, he's such a fool. It takes a fool to invent a thing."

"Oh, does it?" Winterbourne returned.

"When they don't know anything else, they'll up and invent something the sanest man would n't have dreamed of.

Well, I thought, at first, he might have done it. I don't now. I think the thing was stolen."

His excitement was so great, evidently over coils he had tried to loose before, that Winterbourne, with an instinct that it was the only way, began a species of wheedling.

"Well, man, it's an interesting story. When did you see him first?"

"He came to my office. He made his way in over a good deal of opposition. Said he had a message. Could n't see anybody but me. I was rather upset that day, for Ramsay, my confidential clerk, was out, — wife sick, — and the clerk that brought the message got an idea he was from Ramsay."

"Ramsay!"

"So I had him in. He came up to me, — I thought he was going to shoot me, but way he looked I knew 't was no such game, — and stuck this up to my ear, and then he says, 'Good-morning, Mr. Gregory.' And I heard him, plain as you hear me now. I told you how I kissed the watch. Well, I wonder I did n't kiss him. And I've hardly had that trumpet away from my ears long enough to eat and sleep."

Winterbourne, brows shaggily knit, was listening and thinking hard. There was still call for persuasiveness, but he wheedled absently, having too much to ponder.

"It's a great story. He'd heard you needed a trumpet and he'd brought you one?"

"He'd brought it to me to get his patent."

"His patent! The young whelp!"

Gregory had his turn at a question.

"Mr. Winterbourne, is the young man your son?"

"I've no son. Did the misbegotten cub say he was my son?"

"No, but his name is Winterbourne."

"His name is Belial," Winterbourne supplied, *fortissimo*. "Where does he live, the viper?"

"Sutton. That's his post-office address. And Sutton, I take it, is next town to this."

They looked at each other. Then Gregory went on very firmly:—

"Now, Mr. Winterbourne, I'm all ready to own I'm in the wrong. A young man comes to me and puts an invention into my hand. I'm to patent it for him. I'm to engineer the thing and see it through. I don't. I break my word. I sit down and use the thing, and I take no steps toward doing what I said I'd do. And I see the thing's been worn, and I suspect it's stolen, and I take no steps about that. I only know I've got something I would n't part with if there was a new commandment made to cover the case—not unless I could get another like it. That's where we are."

Winterbourne's eyes still had their far-away look, but he put out his hand, and Gregory gripped it with much satisfaction.

"If I could tell you," said Winterbourne, "how the thing was made, if I could give you a diagram of the inside of it, so you could have it manufactured at the next shop, at a cost of a few dollars, would you believe I'd seen the thing before?"

Gregory believed him perfectly, and was content to make a nod for answer.

"And somebody else has seen it before," he commented. "It's been used."

Winterbourne was not ready yet to tell him who had used it. He was still pulling his brows together and thinking. Then the most obvious thought of all occurred to him.

"How did he look?"

"The boy?"

"Was he a boy?"

"Eighteen, I should say. Looked sixteen. Blue eyes, light hair, skin like a girl, all over pink."

Now Winterbourne knew. He came to his feet abruptly and his hat felt the jar. He righted it with one hand and stretched the other, palm up, to Gregory. He had the effect, in his passion, of resisting a stiff breeze.

"Gregory," said he, "that's my trumpet. Give it here."

"Not on your life," said Gregory. "Don't you understand me? I can't be without it."

"I'll give you another. You shall have the twin of it, or you shall have this back. But I know who stole it. I'll confront the whelp."

Gregory removed it from his ear and, with a motion of ultimate decision, consigned it to his pocket. From that point his part in the interview was a bold game of guessing; he could hear nothing.

"No man shall patent an invention of mine," stormed Winterbourne. "I'll patent it myself, or it shall rot. Do you mark me, man? Give me my trumpet."

"You've got all your senses, and I'm one short," Gregory hurled back at him. "If you think I'll give up the one thing that makes life worth living, you're mighty well mistaken."

"Take it out of your pocket, you fool," roared Winterbourne. "Don't you know this is an epic moment? Don't you see it's going to be known through all time as the battle of the ear-trumpet? It's your weapon, man. Do you suppose Hector would have been slain if Achilles had kept his spear in his tail pocket? Out with your trumpet, Roland, for this is Roncesvalles."

The splendor of the moment had overcome him, and he thought no more of Gregory save as the pasteboard protag-

onist to give him something to tilt against while his own steed of fancy pranced and curvetted. But to Gregory, who had no background of historical tapestries, the moment was a painful one, full of the most prosaic verities. Full of cruelty, even, for it appeared that some one was about to push him back again into his silent world. He began manfully, yet almost hysterically withal, to explain:—

“See here, I’d rather die than give it up to you. It’s death to be without it. Why, my life ain’t worth a rotten apple to me, to lose it now I’ve had it once.”

The market, if it could have seen its Gregory, would have been amazed. His clerks would have looked upon him as an alien thing. Here was a man who, from the very impossibility of doing his work against odds, had done it grimly and with a savage precision; and he was almost weeping.

“I don’t want to take it away from you, you infernal idiot!” Winterbourne raged, hysterical in his turn and his own way that splintered masts and ripped the rigging into tatters. “Do you suppose I’d let a thing lie for a hundred years rotting in a drawer and then steal it like a felon from the man that needs it? I want to find the cub that stole it, that’s what I want. Take it out of your pocket and put it up to your ear so you can hear sense. Do you want to drive a man crazy?”

But Gregory, immovable and grand as any other defender of a passionate interest, stood with his hands in his pockets, one of them clutching the trumpet, and faced him. No yielding was in those tear-wet eyes nor about the mouth shut into a moveless line. They watched and interrogated each other so, for a pregnant moment. Then Winterbourne saw his own defeat. Nothing was left but compromise. He put his hand on Gregory’s shoulder, turned him about, and Gregory saw they were to go. He, too, compromised to that

extent, and they got step together and went out of the grove, Winterbourne muttering. On their way up through the lane, undoubtedly the same thoughts travelled, pace for pace, through both their minds. Gregory was combating his impulse to run because Winterbourne, long of limb, could overtake him, and Winterbourne was reasoning that he might, if he chose, stop him on the spot and extract the trumpet. He was big enough.

So they went on into the street and along its length, Gregory unknowing why he went, to the Ramsays', and there Tonty, watering an iris that did n't need it from a diminutive pot Winterbourne had given her, and in an ecstasy of housewifely content, met them joyously, and at sight of her Winterbourne's passion cooled. He had nourished the certainty that Tim would have to be killed, that everlasting justice should be satisfied; but Tonty's serene little face reminded him he could not shed the blood of Tonty's Tim. So he asked for him gently, and Tonty answered out of her shyness because a stranger was with him, that Tim had gone to see mother. Winterbourne turned back down the path, his prisoner with him, and Tonty, rapt with delight because they had taken off their hats to her, grown gentlemen as they were, watched them away. And Winterbourne, going up his own path, where Gregory had hesitated for an instant because it seemed as if this might be a point for them to part company, met Tim coming sunnily out. Winterbourne forgot that this was Tonty's Tim, and saluted him *fortissimo*.

"You misbegotten young cub, where is my ear-trumpet? You stole one; now where's the other?"

And Mrs. Ramsay, sitting above at the window in the first moment of her cure, when she had wanted a book in her hand, turned from the pages of the old fashion-magazine Bess had innocently given her, heard and listened.

Tim turned a shade less pink. Winterbourne saw it, and so did Gregory, who had become, at sight of him, the type of man in an office alive with clerks. Tim was instantly uncomfortable in a way he was not used to. He lived his own capricious life untrammelled. If he did wrong in small ways, the heavens never fell. And now, challenged and unprepared, he spoke suddenly and unadvisedly.

"I have n't got your trumpet. Your daughter's got it."

Winterbourne, taken aback, stared at him.

"My daughter?"

Tim was immediately sorry. He knew he had broken the code. He had told on his accomplice, but though that certainty and regret were well alive in him he said without premeditation,—

"Yes. Celia's got it."

Winterbourne opened the door.

"Come in," said he.

Gregory, full to the brim now with determination to see it through, preceded him, and so, constrained by a glance, did Tim, impudent, but uneasy. In the sitting-room Bess, who had heard them coming, gathered up her book—her Italian book, Winterbourne saw with a pang of love for her dutifulness—and was about to leave them.

"Call your sister," Winterbourne bade her.

She looked at him in a sudden apprehension, he thought, but she went, and he heard her on the stairs. Winterbourne drew forth a chair for Gregory, but Tim, left standing, put his hands in his pockets and whistled until Winterbourne's frown seemed to him too thunderous, and he stopped. It was a moment before Celia came, Bess following. Celia was pale, Winterbourne, in his stern-eyed questioning, saw, but she met his gaze candidly. Bess, behind her, leaned against the casing of the door, and Winterbourne saw she was shaking

and that her hands, entwining upon each other, would not be still. That caused him to speak gently.

"Celia, have you got my ear-trumpet?"

Celia looked at him in a sympathetic questioning. Had he lost something it seemed to say, something he cared very much about?

"No, papa," said she.

Winterbourne, when the occasion was big enough, felt no rages. The present one was very big, he saw, judging from the look on the face of Bess; and his blood cooled. He seemed to see, too, with a great liking for Gregory, that this was why Gregory now stayed out of it. Though with the trumpet in his pocket, he was outside family affairs.

"Think again, Celia," said Winterbourne. "I have found one of them. That's the one that should have been in the desk. Where's the other?"

Then the irony of the puissance of small things came over him, and but for Bess and the anguish of her face he could have laughed. The theft of an ear-trumpet! and here they were standing about in search of the malefactor. Celia was looking straight at him. At least, he thought in admiration, she was game. Then she glanced at Tim, and her lip curled.

"I know where it is, papa," she said. "It's upstairs."

"Get it," said Winterbourne, and Celia composedly turned about, passed her sister without a glance, and went up the stairs.

"Bess," said Winterbourne kindly, "don't you think you'd better go to my wife? She might want something."

She shook her head, and then, in a moment, Celia came, the trumpet in her hand. At sight of it, Gregory's eyes lighted with a passion of fervor. They seemed to say, "So there's another one."

Celia gave the trumpet to Winterbourne with a dutiful grace.

"Did you want to see me?" she hesitated.

"No," said Winterbourne, "I did n't want to see you."

And again she left the room and went up the stairs. Winterbourne stood for a moment, thinking. Then he walked to the front door and opened the screen wide.

Tim followed him, good-natured, acquiescent. Nothing was going to happen, he saw. His experience was that among civilized people things did n't happen.

"That's all," said Winterbourne. "You can go."

The screen closed behind him, but Mrs. Ramsay, clothed in her street dress and ready to come down, had heard, and slipped back to her own room. There was a stranger below, she knew. She would wait. Winterbourne turned.

"Now!" said he, and Gregory, in an understanding of the crisis, drew out the trumpet in hiding. He took his chair again and Winterbourne pulled out another. The little table where Theocritus lay was between them, and on it Winterbourne laid down his trumpet as if it were a game of cards and he was showing his hand.

"That the boy?" he asked.

Gregory nodded. He had his question ready.

"Relative of yours?"

"No."

"Name Winterbourne?"

"No."

"What is his name?"

"Ramsay."

"Not Ramsay's boy? Not our Mr. Ramsay?"

Winterbourne nodded.

"Well, well," said Gregory. He sat in a muse, his eyes absently on the twin trumpet. "Well," said he, "I'm sorry.

I'm most infernally sorry for Ramsay. He's an invaluable man."

"Now," said Winterbourne, "how was it?"

This was business, and Gregory at once became the business man. He told succinctly how Tim had come, acting like a fool so far as the practical aspect of the thing went, but clever, oh, yes! bright in his talk as well as being a fool. And Gregory had not, he owned, gone into it really. For as soon as the thing met his ear, he had been bewitched, and he had no desire save to get it into his own private keeping for a day, an hour. Then, he had believed, he could look into it, or hand it over to a man who would understand it, from within. But he had known underneath that he could n't hand it over to anybody. All he really wanted was to get rid of Tim, inventor or no, unplumbed, hug his treasure to his breast, and embark on the wave of glorious living. He was a criminal, Gregory owned, but he offered it with a smile because, pan-pipes at his ear, he knew he should hear what Winterbourne had to say in turn. What it was made no difference in his sum of happiness. The human tongue now might approve or revile him; at least he should have the ecstasy of that communion.

But Winterbourne was looking at him in almost a melting interest. He had, the confession told him, made a man. He had topped a creature with a sense the law of life had taken away.

"Don't worry yourself, my friend," said he. "I can make you a million just like this. You shall never be without it. I'll give you the drawing this day."

"You invented it yourself?" Gregory said, looking at him in an adoring gratitude ludicrous from those eyes.

"Yes, I invented it."

"It's never been patented?"

"No. I've been too lazy, man. I've been too lazy. I never thought —" He paused and ran back over his forgetfulness of it.

"What?"

Gregory so loved to hear the human voice that he could have begged it to go on indefinitely. Winterbourne answered slowly, —

"I never thought what I was keeping them out of, the people that could n't hear. God forgive me! I've let them perish in their silence."

To do something for them had brought him nearer them. For an instant he thought with passion, not of his old withdrawals, but the approach to men if he could go, pan-pipes in hand, and open their ears for them. "I have n't remembered it for years," he said, "except when somebody's appealed to me. But God forgive me! I thought of it this forenoon because I wanted to get some money out of it."

"You can get some money out of it," Gregory assured him briefly.

"Not too much," Winterbourne held him back. "Not too much. Let 'em pick it off every tree." Then he bethought him that it would be dinner-time presently and Bess would have to feed them, if they sat there. "I'll tell you what we'll do," said he. "I can't ask you to my table because we're short of help. But there's a little tavern a mile along the road, and there we'll eat. And I'll take a roll of paper and a pencil in my pocket and I'll put the inside of pan-pipes before you, and you'll see it's no such hard matter to make a man hear."

Bess saw them walking away together down the street. Gregory, the trumpet at his ear, was looking up and listening with devoted interest, and Winterbourne, from the wagging of his head, was rolling out a monologue.

XXX

CELIA was locked in her room. Bess did not know whether she had eaten any dinner at all, but after she had knocked two or three times at intervals and been told to go away, she had to see that her patients were fed, and went about that in a preoccupied haste, her mind heavily upon Celia. Mrs. Ramsay she found in a state of majestic insubordination. She had her clothes on, and she stated that she must see Mr. Winterbourne at once. She had thought of the word she wanted to say to him all these weeks, and she could pronounce it perfectly. She wanted to see him and also she wished to see her son.

“Tony?” Bess inquired, knowing how assuaging Tony had been in the maternal arms of late.

But it was not Tony. It was Tim. Mrs. Ramsay said this with a compression of the lips befitting the Spartan mother. Tim, most evidently, was to be dealt with. Catherine also had been to Celia’s door, and once, on a return from this fruitless pilgrimage with a face of woe, she met Bess. She whispered portentously, in her way of regarding Celia as a creature pathologically undone, and Bess had a sudden sense of outrage that Catherine should know her darling had been so put to shame.

“Bess,” Catherine whispered, “you must deal with her. I have n’t the strength.”

In the middle of the afternoon Celia set her door ajar, and Bess, watching for it, knocked timidly. Celia bade her come in, composedly enough, and Bess entered and locked the door behind her. Celia, dressed very carefully in an out-door

gown, sat by the window, doing nothing. Her room had almost an austere aspect of tidiness. She seemed to have been putting away the trifles that ordinarily had place on her bureau and her table. Bess dared not look her in the face. Celia had done even childishly wrong, and they both felt the shame of it. But she started at her sister's voice. It was hard in a way that indicated anticipation of a serious, not a trifling moment.

"Why do you do that?" Celia was asking her.

"What?"

"Lock the door."

"I did n't want her to come in," Bess answered simply.

Then she went forward and, without premeditation, sank on the floor, laid her arms upon her sister's knees, and put her head down on them. Expressed emotion was the rarest thing with her. She could look it in a still, warm way, but its outspoken language she seemed never to have learned. To Celia, gazing down at her, the brown head with its beautiful hair, the abandon of the strong shoulders, it seemed as if she had never loved her sister so terribly, with such an ache, such a sense of isolation with her, as if they two were clinging together in a world unfriendly to them. But she said, in the same hard voice, —

"What are you doing that for? Get up and sit in a chair."

Bess did get up, her hands fruitlessly to her face, to cover it from tears. She was crying in a silent way, and Celia looked at her quietly and loved her and wanted to hurt her because she cried.

"We must go away, dear," Bess said, as soon as she could speak. "I've been thinking about it all the afternoon."

"Where?" Celia asked it coldly, without real interest.

"I don't know yet. I've been thinking. We could do

one thing anyway." She looked at Celia now timidly, knowing how she would take it. "We could go back to the tavern."

"Where you worked?"

"Yes." She took a little sip of courage at being even hearkened to. "I could do the cooking. They'd take me on again. They'd be glad—and you could board." Celia was looking at her with an unmoved face, and Bess plucked up heart to continue. "Mrs. Ramsay won't stay long. She's fretting about her children. I've seen it. Maybe she'd be better at home. She could do a little here and there and not think so much about herself."

"You want to get back," said Celia bitterly.

"I?"

"Yes. You're homesick for the tavern, the boarders, your work."

The last word was hard to utter. It projected an infinitude of servile tasks, and Bess, even, was abhorrent to her for the moment because she could endure them. Bess sat now regardless of covering her tear-stained face, hands clasped about her knees, looking sadly past her sister.

"No," she said, "no. I'd done with the place pretty soon after you took me away from it. I don't want to go back to it. But it's the only place there is."

A momentary curiosity qualified Celia's look.

"What do you like?" she asked. "Where do you want to stay?"

A soft radiance beamed from Bess. It made her face into a glowing wonder.

"Here," she said softly, as if to her inner mind. "Oh, there's no place like here."

"This house?"

"This house, this town."

She looked like a creature fallen in love, but Celia, studying her, judged that it must be, incredible as it seemed, with the place. Bess was thinking only of Winterbourne, how kind he was, how safe everything was with him, the smallest and the biggest, because he was just kind and allowed you to be free. Celia's face had hardened again from its momentary breaking.

"Then what do you want to go away for?" she asked.

"We must," said Bess. The look of grief had come again. "We've done —" She stopped, and Celia went on for her, —

"Don't say we've done. We have n't done anything. I've told lies, you mean."

Bess, tongue-tied by nature, found it impossible to show her that with the tie between them and the love between them, their loneliness of kin, the sin of one was the other's sin also, and they must stand or fall together.

"And what about?" said Celia, in scorn. "An ear-trumpet! I said I had n't it when I had. An ear-trumpet was not to be found for half an hour when nobody particularly wanted it, and I was asked if I had it, and I said no."

In the confusion of her mind, the strain of her anger, and because she needed food, it was all unmeasured folly to her. It seemed foolish that Tim had wanted it, foolish in her to have taken it for him, to have denied she had it. The thought uppermost in her mind was that Tim was a fool, and he had been allowed by a silly destiny to bring about this upheaval. She was angry to the bottom of her consciousness. That she could not altogether have explained. But the world seemed now her enemy. Bess was speaking at last. She had thought of some things so long that now they came fluently.

"It is n't what we've done to-day. It's all that led to it."

"Led to what? Mislaying an ear-trumpet?"

Bess looked at her in an agony. She wished Celia would understand and she need not say it.

"Why, we owe them everything," she said. "They brought you up."

Celia's face seemed to harden again.

"Well," she returned. "What then?"

Bess had it all thought out.

"They've been so square with us. They've made you a lady. Just think, Celia, you're a lady." She spoke as if the word even were incredible.

"Don't say I'm a lady in that tone," Celia bade her harshly, "as if it was so astonishing to be a lady. Are n't you a lady?"

"Oh, no," said Bess, with a perfect simplicity. "I can't even speak good grammar. I've worked too hard. But you're a lady, Celia. Oh, you're lovely!"

She rocked back and forth in an ecstasy of pity and admiration, and sorrow over the mischance that had made her sister look so soiled to her. Celia was plucking up a little spirit. Somebody still admired her, it appeared, and on that she could thrive meagrely. Blame seemed to slay her. But Bess knocked down the fair fabric she had erected.

"And it's all no good," she said, "no good. If we do things like that, we're low and mean. I wish we'd died before it."

"Things like what? Saying things—"

Bess nodded, not looking at her.

"Saying they're so when they're not. Mother would n't have done it," she grieved. "The way the old woman spoke of her! She was sweet. Father would n't have done it, either."

"Why do you say he wouldn't? What do we know about him?"

Bess put up her head a little in Celia's own way.

"We know one thing. The folks there told me. There was a little bound girl, and the family that had her did n't treat her well, and the neighbors did n't dare to make any fuss about it because they were afraid the man would burn their barns. But father did it. He had it brought into court, and he stood up and faced it. I know that about him."

"Well," said Celia. Then she laughed a little, but there was no mirth in it. "So I'm the black sheep. I am a disgrace to you."

Bess wrung her hands in a spontaneous action of grief.

"How can you!" she said. "You are the prettiest — the dearest — it's only because you must n't, Celia, you must n't say what is n't true."

Celia suddenly looked sick and pale. She had resolved to eat no more in that house; but her healthy young body cried for food. Yet what could she do? If she went away, as she intended doing, it was her enemy's money she must go on. But that, she reflected, in another moment, could be paid back. The food also might be, in some fashion.

"Could I have a glass of milk?" she asked humbly, and Bess gave a little cry, the articulate sound a mother might make in hastening to her young.

"I'll bring it to you here," she said, and hurried out.

Celia made no objection to that. It was too hard, she knew, to leave the room and meet Catherine's insistent eyes. Bess came back with her kind little tray, and Celia ate, hungrily and with a careful determination to prime herself for action.

"There," said she at the end, "run away now. I'm going out. I'm going to walk a little. When I come back —" but

there she stopped. It was suddenly evident to her that she was going to lie again.

"Could n't I go with you?" Bess had hesitated.

"No. I want to think."

Was that, too, a lie? she wondered suddenly. Her mind was beginning to torment her.

Bess went heavily away down the stairs, and Celia, listening, heard her going on to the kitchen with her tray. Celia pinned on her hat hastily and took her little bag. After a moment's listening she slipped down the front stairs and noiselessly out at the door. Walking down the path and along the street, she felt with a sick heart that something dreadful in its definiteness had been done. She had taken upon herself exile from Bess, who had not cast her off, but from whom she had parted when it was evident that her sister was ashamed of her. And hurrying on, her head held high to meet the bright day before which she was determined to own no shame, she saw Lovell coming, driving fast, with his hat off, and that alert, delighted look she called to his face already overspreading it. She would have passed him, but he had driven to the curb.

"Can't I take you somewhere?" he asked.

She shook her head, essaying a smile. He was out of the wagon and beside her.

"What is it, Celia?" he was asking warmly.

Celia felt her eyes filling with tears. He seemed, by his admiring love, to be reinstating her on old grounds. He, at least, did not find her a disgrace.

"I'm going away," she said.

"Where?"

"To Boston."

"When are you coming back?"

"I'm not coming."

"Celia!"

The sun, she saw, would fail out of his heaven. She nodded over her shoulder at the house.

"I have left them."

Lovell stood still a moment, enraged she found with what must have been her wrongs, and that consoled her slightly.

"Get in," he said then. "We'll drive a little, and I'll take you to the station if you've got to go."

It was a tone she felt obliged to hear, and she stepped into the wagon, he following her. They went rather fast until they were out of the street, and Lovell turned into a leafy road skirting the back of the station and drew the horse to a walk.

"Now," said he, "what is it?"

She felt uneasily that she had never heard this tone in him. He had been the suppliant bringing tribute to his dear. This almost made it seem as if here was some one else to reckon with. Something must be said, and she offered weakly, —

"They are not to blame."

"You don't mean they've turned you out?"

"I chose to go."

"Not Winterbourne — Winterbourne would n't do a thing like that."

"They don't know I am going. I decided upon it myself."

"Your sister? Is she going?"

"No. Bess is n't going."

"What does this mean, Celia?" said Lovell, in a tone of resolution. "You've got to tell me."

How could she tell him? Could she say, "I said I had n't an ear-trumpet when I had?" The puerile folly of it. He would lift his face to heaven and laugh with an uncontrolled shout-

ing like Winterbourne's own. But the ear-trumpet was not it. That was the last silly cue that brought on all the other tragedy about her, Catherine's sickened looks and that unbearable sad plea from Bess. It was what had gone before. It was the ill way they evidently believed her life was tending.

"I am not what they thought," she said, and it sounded as if she said it haughtily.

Lovell looked upon her frowningly, wondering, she saw, not in the least intending to accept anything less than the clean fact.

"But that's ridiculous," said he. "They've known you all your life. People don't turn us out for sentimental reasons. Guess again!"

He was laughing, and the bright day made it seem for the moment as if she might at least smile a little; but the thought of Bess and her grief dried her throat anew.

"I'm going to see Winterbourne about this," he said, with energy. "It's a fancy you've got up. I never heard of anything more intangible."

"No," said Celia. "It's not intangible. It's true. I'm going away, and if you see Mr. Winterbourne, if you see any of them to talk about it, I shall go away from you."

"Then," said Lovell, "if you are going away, you must come to me. We must be married now, short off. The house is n't begun even, but you could wait for that. You could stand my little shanty, knowing you were going to have the other."

He was the adoring lover. Her heart gave a cry of triumph. She must seem to him very nice indeed. In that light he looked very nice to her, a companion, a vindicator. But was it true, her brooding mind insisted on putting in here, that she could claim vindication? Or was she what Bess thought her? Pondering it, she answered absently,—

"No, not that."

"Not that? It's the only thing. What are you going to do in Boston?"

She did not know.

"Have you any money?" He asked it as if it were the most ordinary thing to ask, with a simplicity that made it delicate.

"A little."

"A little won't do. You must let me give you some."

"No! no!"

That, he saw, was definite, and it settled the case for him.

"Then you will stay here. You will let me drive you back home, and you will be ready to-morrow morning and I'll come and marry you."

"Why, no!" she said, "why, no!"

"Yes. Have your hat on, dearest, and we'll walk out of the house after it's over. I'll ask no questions either of you or the family. It's a complication—a misunderstanding—some folly, I haven't a doubt; but we must tackle it and ignore it and live it down. And I'm the gainer, if it drives you to me."

His very air was of gay certainties. This was what life had done for him. He had had his own complications to live down and had done it in the wrong way, so retrospect declared. He would never be again on the craven's side.

"No," said Celia, "no."

"I shall come," he asserted, "at ten to-morrow. You will be ready for me."

"I can't be married in that house," she flung out desperately.

He considered. Courting lads and lasses were always driving or walking away to the minister and coming home man and wife. It was conformable enough to the standard

of Clyde. But for his only and unapproached lady it would not do. She must have the sanction of roofs and covenants.

"Yes," said he, "you must be ready for me at ten. I shall be there."

Celia felt, with a mingling of terror and surprise, that she had never been faced by a will so strong. Lovell himself was riding bareback on the joy of dominating circumstance. No more Theocritus for him until the hand of age began to press him down, inch by gentle inch. This was life, life. He turned, and they drove slowly back again, past the station, and Celia saw she was not to go. She hardly knew what she wished. The sheer passion of an hour before, when anger was the spur to action, had gone, and she knew, if she threw herself capriciously out into the world, there was nothing for her to do there.

"Will you —" she began. They were nearing Winterbourne's again, and her teeth seemed to shut convulsively upon the words — "will you — if I do it, will you be good to my sister? Will you let her come to me?"

He looked round at her.

"Good to your sister? How can you ask me? She shall live with you. I shan't rule you, dear. I'm ruling you now because it's best — but not after."

He got out and held up his hands to her. But she did not move, and he saw she looked most miserable. Her eyes were interrogating his. Bess had come to the door, and stood there awaiting them. Celia knew that, and something in Bess seemed to constrain her in what she had to say:—

"If I should tell you what the trouble was, you would n't — want me."

Lovell felt surprise, uneasiness at the pain she was undergoing, but he forbade his eyes to flinch.

"Yes," he said. "I should want you whatever it was."

"If it was my fault—" she began, as if she were making dreary confession before Bess, who stood on the steps unconsciously impelling her.

"If it was your fault. Come, jump out. I've got a lot to do before to-morrow."

"If I were a person to disgrace you —"

"Jump out," he bade her even gayly now. "You and I are n't going to talk this over. We're going to begin to live. There's a new world created, and it's ours."

There spoke the poet in him, irrepressibly, though he had bade himself now take every exigency like a man only because nothing was better than to be a man.

Celia did step down from the wagon, and not seeing, went up the path where Bess awaited her, and Lovell turned away. He drove rapidly now, and to Celia's hearing the sound was of a part with his peremptory words. Bess came down a step to meet her and touched her dress humbly, as if she must make sure of her and dared not offer a caress.

"I was afraid," she said. "I saw your little bag was gone."

Celia's harshness toward her—the harshness of hurt love—was melted. She felt gentle and very tired, and it was restful to her to have escaped that surge of passions.

"Come upstairs," she said. "I've got to talk to you."

In her own room, while Bess waited, eager to do a service, she languidly took off her hat and gloves, and then turned to regard her sister. She did not want to sit. That seemed to begin an interview from which she might not easily escape.

"Bess," she said, "Mr. Lovell is coming here to-morrow. He is going to marry me."

Bess looked at her a moment.

"Sit down, dear," she said then, soothingly. "No, you lie down. You're all tired out."

Celia saw she had not understood. But she could not argue it.

"It will be at ten," she said drearily. "Could you help me drag in my trunks from the back hall? I must do my packing."

Now Bess believed it, but she was confounded by the pace the world was making.

"Celia," she implored, "what is it? What's set you off to do a thing like that? O Celia, not to get away from here?"

Celia felt that the way to attain silence was to give a reason. It was impossible to enter into talk.

"We have been engaged to be married for—" She was about to say "for a long time," and then that frightened consciousness told her here were lies again. "We are to be married," she ended. "Come, let's get the trunks."

There was no way but to agree. She was keyed to a point where she could have dragged them in alone, and Bess helped her, working noiselessly, and then stood by in frozen misery while Celia folded delicate things and packed them with a care. It was not the part of Bess to dally while work went on, and presently she too began folding and laying cleverly. The task was an anguish to her. She had sometimes thought, in a shy, hidden way, of Celia's marrying. Celia was so beautiful that the most wonderful lot of all seemed decreed for her, and now here the dewy moment had come and they were making ready for it as if destiny were behind. But she could not speak. Once the tears came, but she wiped them away lest they touch her sister's clothes and make an omen. When they had finished and Celia shut down the last lid, she looked at Bess, and aware of the trouble of it all, yet now not much moved by it, said imperiously, though in a quiet way,—

"One thing. You must not speak of it."

"Not speak of it? Not to her?"

"No."

"But, Celia, I must speak to him."

"No. If they are here when I go downstairs, they can be told. They can be there if they like. I would have gone away, but —" She was about to say that Lovell had forbidden it, but she could not use his name. He seemed to belong to her and yet was alien to her. "It would n't be fair to them."

"But this isn't fair to them. It's their house. O Celia, we couldn't use it so and not tell them."

Celia stood a moment thinking bitterly. Was this another point, her outraged vanity asked her, where she was dense to the propriety of life? Was Bess, who always counselled the unselfish thing, more gently bred than she?

"Very well," she said. "Tell them then. But don't tell her till morning. She'd have things to eat. She'd talk with me. And tell him that. Tell him I won't be talked to."

Bess, without a look at her, because she seemed to herself now to have helped bring this incredible destiny about, and she would plague her sister no more, was softly going. But Celia came after her, with a little rush, and threw passionate arms about her.

"You can live with me," she whispered, in her fierce devotion to the tie of blood, "if you're willing to. He says so."

They kissed, and Bess dared the question some one, she felt, must ask. .

"O Celia, do you like him? Enough, Celia, do you like him well enough?"

"You're to live with me," Celia threw at her. "There! go, and I'll lie down."

XXXI

WINTERBOURNE, after such an afternoon in the city as he had not had for years, and loathed at any period of his life, came home aglow all over at the pleasure of it. Gregory had insisted on dropping in at a vaudeville where a girl with a sweet voice sang a topical song charmingly. Winterbourne hated topical songs and close theatres, but it seemed to him he could spend more time than that in alien pursuits at Gregory's side, watching him bathe himself in life. Then, when Gregory could escape the seductions of the world of sound, they retired to his library in the quiet house whence women-folk had fled to the country, and sat down at a table for a stiff business talk, while Winterbourne drew models and explained and learned to know the promoter, the man to whom affairs were an open book. The upshot of it was that Gregory would take hold of pan-pipes and disseminate it with an enthusiasm to make it earn its way. Winterbourne liked him. There was something that tickled his sense of fun in Gregory's babylike debauch among the things of sense, a hard nut like him.

He came home in abounding good-humor, yet bent on one task, this concerning Tim. He would have been prepared to find Bess waiting for him with some simple comfort or other, or even Celia, picturesquely affectionate, or perhaps his wife, risen from her bed of languor to resuscitate romance; but what he did meet knocked him into an unexpected flurry. He entered his own sitting-room and halted at the vision there, — Mrs. Ramsay clothed in her perfect mind, rather majestic, so that you might laugh a little at her

if you would, seeing how she recalled the intellectual ladies of a long-past day, the tinge of old-fashioned grandiosity, but very direct and purposeful.

She began at once. She had been waiting for him.

"Mr. Winterbourne, I have recovered the use of my speech."

"I am delighted, Mrs. Ramsay." He put his hat and stick away — he was a more careful man in these days, having found Bess setting his confusions in order — and sank into his chair. "You've had a nasty time."

"During my stay," said Mrs. Ramsay, in her careful English, "for which I shall never cease to be grateful, I have been endeavoring to make a certain statement to you. But my tongue would not serve me. Now I have command of it. Mr. Winterbourne, my son Timothy possessed himself of your ear-trumpet. He — stole it."

Winterbourne felt like groaning. He had come home at peace with all the world, knowing that the only task left him was castigating Timothy for Timothy's good, and here was the ear-trumpet cropping up again. But he rose bravely to the assault.

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Ramsay. I'll settle that with Tim when I get round to it."

She sat majestically and now shook her head.

"No, Mr. Winterbourne. For the sake of Timothy we must go into it very thoroughly. When my boy told me he was about to patent an invention, I thought he had devised something unaided. Then I found he had in some way possessed himself of — something that belonged to you."

Winterbourne remembered the day in the arbor, and thought he could explain the way. But chiefly was he anxious to escape more parleying.

"It does n't matter, Mrs. Ramsay," he said kindly.

But then at once it became apparent to him that she felt disgraced in her child, that she had felt it all these weeks, and that she was suffering with shame, and his heart grew at once compassionate toward her; she seemed to him something to be protected, like one of her own children. She had passed into that changed estate where we are, because we suffer, again like little children. She was not storming battlements now, and disturbing his ears with the whanging of her steel on steel. She was the normal woman, and he could see how Ramsay had very naturally loved her.

"Something," she said, "must be done for my son. I have not spoken to his father. We have not talked about the children very much."

Immediately he saw that she, absentee as she had been from her own household, had wished to save Ramsay, also an absentee, to the end that he should pursue his figuring in peace.

"You are a man of the world," she continued. "Timothy has tried to do a disgraceful thing."

"The reason he did n't do it," Winterbourne found himself saying bluntly, "is the way he took to do it. The boy —" he was ending, "the boy's a fool," but he qualified, "The boy's not used to business."

"No. But he must be punished. I should like to have you prescribe the form of punishment. I should wish to know you had administered it."

Winterbourne nodded. He thought of his stout stick. That seemed to fit a culprit of Tim's calibre. But now he was getting uneasy with this majestic lady, whose pose seemed almost to cry out for the turban of Mrs. Hannah More. He wished she would go to bed.

"All right, Mrs. Ramsay," said he. "I'll see to Tim."

She rose. He saw she was trembling, and knew the interview had cost her something.

"I cannot express my gratitude to your household," she was saying. "As for that sweet girl who has devoted herself to me, I shall probably never be able to repay her in this world. If there is a world to come, as I am fully convinced, I hope she will there be recompensed. I shall go home to-morrow."

Winterbourne's heart leaped for joy.

"Do you think you are quite able?" he inquired hypocritically.

"I am rested," said Mrs. Ramsay, "sufficiently to go on. And my children need me."

She shook hands with him in a definitive way, and Winterbourne, shuddering at the possibilities of her, rhetorical and pugnacious, watched her go. And then, as if she had been waiting, Bess came to him from the dining-room, and he was horrified at the change in her.

"What is it, child?" said he.

She stopped at a distance from him and drooped her head against the mantel, holding by it with one hand.

"Celia is going to be married," she said in a low voice, "to-morrow morning. She and Mr. Lovell."

Winterbourne started out of his wonder. He thought only of Lovell, and in the instant knew how undesirable Celia seemed to him because he felt merely that Lovell must be saved.

"I'll go down and see him," said he.

"No," said Bess, "no." She said it quietly, yet he was stayed by the commandingness of it. "Let it be as it is. If you are willing to have her married here, in this room, — that will be all we can do."

"Does my wife know?"

"It would spoil her night. I thought I'd tell her in the morning."

"But he must n't," Winterbourne was saying, really to himself, "he must n't do a thing like that."

"Please let them," said Bess simply.

It was all she could say. It was evident to her that Celia must go on. The only point now was to have it done in an ordered calm. Winterbourne looked at her a while, her evident grief, her drooping pose, and yet the inflexibility of her when she had made up her mind.

"Bess," he said, at length, "I wish you had n't been dragged into all this. We're not very happy here. I wish you did n't have to grow under our shadow."

She was always amazing him. Now she lifted her head, and her face glowed all over in that lovely color.

"Oh, don't be sorry," she said, in a voice of exquisite emotion. "I'm not. I'm glad. If I never had come, I never should have seen you."

As he looked at her, she seemed to him the most sacred and the purest thing born into this complex life. She loved him. She was devoted to him. She joyously confessed it; yet it was a love all honor, all restraint. He doubted, in this probing of its meaning, whether, if he were willing to sully the spring of life for her, it could even be turned into the mud-died pool of desires forbidden. But something had to be said, and none of them should be the base brood of sentiment gone wrong.

"You had to come, child, did n't you?" he said, in the kind voice she loved. "You had to help us out of the holes we were in, Mrs. Ramsay and all."

She smiled at him, and for the moment it seemed as if she had forgotten Celia.

"Well," said Winterbourne, "you're my well-beloved

daughter, and what you say goes. Celia shall be married in this room, and I'll black my shoes and brush my hair. And now I'm going out. Don't sit up for me."

Her alarm was instantly awake.

"You're not going to Mr. Lovell's?"

"No, child. I'm going to see Tim Ramsay. I've got an errand to him. Good-night, kid."

"Do you want your stick?" she asked, out of her instinct of service.

"Yes," said Winterbourne grimly, "I want it very particularly. Good-night."

When he was gone, Bess looked about the room with an incredulous gaze, as if a thing like marriage could not enter there so unannounced, crowned, and to the music of heartbeats. Then the most remarkable thing she had ever known befell her. Dwight Hunter, in his best clothes, she had time to notice, opened the door, came in, and stood there waiting. He was very handsome, very well equipped for another life than sweeping kitchens, a superb young man. Hunter had always come near to putting himself wrong with her because he seemed so humbly suing her. His air had changed.

"Bess," he began directly, "I tried to work to-night and I could n't."

"I'm glad of it," she said quickly. "You give too much time to that old furniture."

"That is n't my only work. I tried to fiddle. That pleases you. But I've spoiled my hands. It doesn't matter. The fiddling's behind me, and I don't care. But it's come to me that I can't do anything of any sort until things are settled between you and me."

He was talking with an intensity of determination to say what was in his mind. She listened gravely and with some concern, he seemed so moved, almost so harsh.

"I've just one thing to say to you," said Hunter. "It's this. I want you to marry me. It's not likely you'll say yes on the spot, but I'd like to have you thinking it over, keeping me in your mind, trying me, you know, so you can come to a decision as soon as possible."

The way he set forth his petition had something dry in it, almost indifferent. Yet his face was not impassive. It besought her to think well of him. He was to have his turn at surprises. Bess was smiling at him, wondering, it seemed. Her eyes were lovely in their brightness.

"Are you sure," she said, "you mean it, just like that?"

"Just like what, Bess?" But she would not answer, and he had to find the words again. "I want to marry you. Don't you see?"

"Oh," said Bess, "that's the most beautiful thing that was ever said to me. Oh, I thank you. I can't tell you how I thank you."

Did ever a girl receive an offer of a man in such a spirit? Yet there was something lacking. He could not open a door to the rush of feeling in himself. She was no nearer him, even further it might be, than she was before. He wanted to stretch out his hands to her, but that seemed useless, she was really so far away. But she was glad, and yet it was for some reason he had not fathomed and even, it appeared, not due to him at all.

"Thank you," she said again, shyly, it seemed, this time.

"Then," said Hunter, and now the nervous tension of it all made him laugh a little, "then, Bess, I'm accepted."

She started back a pace.

"Oh, no," said she, "not that. It could n't be that anyway, but it's lovely of you to ask me. That's what I mean."

Hunter felt the irony of it a little, as he had years ago when, in the testing of his various powers, he had sent an article to a magazine and received it again with expressions of gratitude almost profuse.

"What are you so mighty pleased for," said he, "if you won't have me?"

Bess looked at him, in a soft implication that she was still thankful and he would understand.

"Of course I could n't do it," she repeated. "But you see you think I'm worth it. Fit for it, I mean."

"Fit to marry me? Why, Bess, you'd have to stoop to me."

He meant that fiercely; she saw it, but she shook her head.

"Oh, no," she said, in her tone of certainty. "You see I'm not a lady, and you're splendid."

Was ever flattery so beguilingly given because it was so honest? Hunter felt his face reddening, and suddenly he wanted to laugh. He began to have for her the feeling Winterbourne had, that she was the simplest, most delicious instance of unconscious humor the world had yet produced.

"Don't chaff," said he. Then his tone softened into the lovingest one possible, because the clear look of her eyes seemed so appealing to him. "What do you want to say you're not a lady for, when you're what you are?"

"Oh, I don't even speak good grammar," she assured him eagerly. "I don't know how to do the things ladies do, and if I did know I should n't do 'em. They'd just bother me."

"What things, Bess?"

He was beginning to be diverted now. Passionate love was retiring a pace in favor of an unstinted amusement at her delicious queerness.

"Making calls," she answered promptly, "and talking about books. I like to do things with my hands, and be alone, and take care of houses. You see, I'm not a lady."

If Hunter had ever doubted that he wanted her, the doubt would have fled now pursued by his unconquerable laughter. She looked at him in mild reproach, not seeing he was thinking how she would enliven every hour from the morning until the evening with her clear candor.

"I should n't think you'd laugh," said she reproachfully.

Then he sobered.

"Bess," said he, "you're a very beautiful lady."

She bent her head a little, involuntarily, as if it felt a crown.

"Thank you," said she. "It means a good deal coming just now."

"Then you see," he said craftily, addressing himself to her conceit, if she had any, "you have something very few people have. You've a beautiful voice."

She looked at him in quick suspicion, in blank discouragement.

"It is n't on account of that you're asking me," she said, "because I can sing?"

"Oh, no," he hastened to assure her. "I should love you if you were dumb as an owl."

"Because I could n't bear that again."

"Bess," said Hunter, for he felt things had gone far enough for him to venture a bribe, "you say you're not what you'd like to be. Now you marry me, and we'll go to Europe and talk grammar all day long."

"Oh, no," she said innocently. "I don't have to go to Europe to learn things. He'd teach me."

"Winterbourne?"

"Yes," she said, her clear gaze upon him. "He knows

everything. Oh, I can learn things, if I only get a mite of time."

"Bess," he ventured guardedly, "you're fond of Winterbourne?"

"Oh, yes," she answered fervently, "he's everything to me. I read something the other day that told what he was: 'Your father and mother and brother and sister.' Celia is my sister and she's everything to me, but he's everything, too."

Hunter advanced upon her and caught up both her hands in his and held them until they were hurt. That he knew, and meant it.

"Well," he said, "there's one thing he's not. He's not your lover." She looked at him in a new-born haughtiness. "And I am," he hastened. "And he's not your husband. And that I'm going to be. Remember."

She pulled her hands away and he was ready to let them go, not quite sure himself of the prudence of restraint, and she looked ruefully at their bruised plumpness. He thought she was angry, but to his amaze she suddenly smiled up at him.

"That's all right," she said. "I'm glad you hurt me. Once, you know —"

"Well, out with it."

She was ashamed, but she answered humbly.

"Once I struck you. I was n't a lady."

"We're quits then, Bess."

But she had talked enough about these matters. There was just one thing more to say.

"But I wish you'd go to Europe," she assured him. "You ought to make the most of yourself. It is n't enough for a young man like you to be driving round on an express cart here in Clyde."

"What if I like it? Just as you like not making calls?"

"Oh, there 's other things," she assured him. "He says you're the King of Clyde. You ought to know all the things there are in the world, so you'll be a good king."

He was profoundly touched.

"Ought I?" he said, and put out his hand to her. Bess gave him hers frankly, and before she could think what was befalling her, he had kissed it. "Ought I?" he asked again. "Well, you ought to yourself. Good-night, Queen of Clyde."

Then he went without delay, and Bess was left holding her hand behind her, shut tight because it was so shy over the touch upon it. Bess did not know what to think of herself. She was a little, a very little happier, even if Celia was going to be strangely married to-morrow, and she knew it was because so splendid a person had thought her worth his name.

And this was how Winterbourne had done his errand to Tim. He had walked up to the Ramsay door and opened it and gone in. But Tim was not, as he expected, lying on the sofa, where he spent so much of his lazy life. He was sitting under a lamp with a dingy chimney, absorbedly outlining a pond lily in white on a breadth out of a discarded petticoat. There were long stitches for water and soft shaded blooms. It was Japanese. There was illusion in it. But Winterbourne's casual glimpse at it, before Tim tossed it guiltily behind the sofa, only tended to confirm his theory that Tim was a poor trumpery thing.

"Get up," said Winterbourne. He grasped his stick the tighter. "Get up and come with me."

Tim did not move.

"That you, Jackie?" he inquired. Winterbourne read the uneasiness in his voice. "Have a chair."

"Get up," said Winterbourne, and reached down to him, putting a hand by chance upon his collar.

Then Tim rose and followed him out of the house and down the path. There he stopped and faced about.

"Say, Jackie, what is it?" he asked fretfully. "I've got a cold."

"Timothy Ramsay," said Winterbourne, "you are a sneak and a liar, and the worst of it is, you're a fool. And I came up here to-night to thrash you like a little boy, but I won't do it, for your mother's a good and a pathetic woman, and she's sold all she's got for dross, and your father's to be pitied. So I bid you mend your ways, and be honest, man, honest. And—" here the warmth in him came bursting out—"when Mr. Gregory and I've got our manufacturing in order, maybe we'll send you out to sell a bill of goods: for you're a pretty lad and you could talk the legs off a brass pot. Good-night, and mend your ways." And he took the road home and muttered to himself, "I'm a fool, a putty-hearted fool."

Bess sat on his steps waiting for him. She got up and walked in before him, pausing then in the hall because she had just one thing to say. Winterbourne had to look at her steadily to be sure the dim light even had not blinded him, for here she was all of a radiance who had been so cast down.

"Daddy," said she.

She whispered, and he whispered mysteriously back, "Yes, kiddie."

"Mr. Hunter has asked me to marry him. So I wanted to tell you I'll study all the books you say, because I've got to be different."

"Lord above us!" said Winterbourne. "So he's got ye."

"No, no," said Bess, in great surprise that he could think it. "Why, no! only if he says I'm good enough for that, why, I've got to make something of myself. He thinks I'm a lady. It's wonderful. I've got to be one."

So she ran upstairs, having shared her deep conclusion, and left him pondering.

XXXII

THE strangeness of the next morning was all one with Celia's conception of it. At ten o'clock she came downstairs, Bess, her face overspread with what seemed apprehension, beside her, and Lovell was waiting at the stair-foot. Inside the room were the others, — the young parson, eager to please, making conversation out of local nothings, and Catherine, dead white in a pretty *négligé*, looking as if the sky had fallen. Winterbourne, out of pity for her, because she incredibly considered it so important, stood by her clad in his seldom-worn best, and amid this hush of circumstance, Celia was married and kissed, and walked out of the house with Lovell, who alone looked what weddings should induce in mortal man. The little parson stayed briefly and expressed his sympathy for Mrs. Winterbourne, who, it began to dawn upon him, looked very ill indeed; and then he went, and Catherine rose to go to her own room but turned instead and, crying silently, leaned upon Winterbourne's shoulder, where he endeavored to resuscitate her by large pats of a gentle hand and mumbled kindnesses.

Bess, apparently not seeing them, her own face sad with wakefulness and the misery of it all, moved about setting back chairs to an exact line, and now, having felt so much, feeling nothing. Catherine was talking wildly among her sobs.

"She never loved me, John. She never had a spark of love for me. She never told me she was engaged to him —"

"You've been sick," Winterbourne reminded her. He

was most unaffectedly sorry for her, and his shoulder was getting wet with tears which gave him a comical distaste. "Of course she did n't bring you a hue and cry like that."

"She walked out of the house as if I were a stranger to her. When I kissed her, it was like kissing a marble image —"

Bess was before them, speaking tremblingly but with resolution.

"It is n't because she is n't thankful to you. We're both thankful."

Catherine was recalled.

"No, no," she murmured. "That's not it. It was because I wanted her to love me. I've loved her so much." Then Bess turned away, and left them, and Catherine had more to say. "Nobody has ever loved me," she averred, standing there shuddering in the circle of her husband's arm. "No one. You know it, John."

Winterbourne was silent for a moment, the big kind hand stroking her shoulder. This was emotion, unsummoned by its object, undesired. He had the natural man's desire to run. But he called upon himself, with some echo of the voices he had been evoking out of the night to rule his being, to meet her trouble for her because she was, for this earthly span, his destiny.

"Catherine," said he. There was authority in his voice, something new also, in that it implied he had been listening to her. "You're a goose," said Winterbourne. "You waste your time brooding over this thing we call love. Don't you do it. Look at the leaves. Look at the sky. Why, they're enough to spend a lifetime over. You get well, Kit, and we'll take a walk. We'll take one every day, and see how the world's getting on. But we must n't fret like this over people's not loving us. It's — we can't, that's all."

She withdrew a pace and looked at him. The words were kindly. They were not warm, yet there was an implication somewhere that she was to share his life. She felt a little nearer him.

"See here, Catherine," said he. "I've been watching a deaf man hear. I suppose I can imagine what it would be for a blind man to see. Now you and I've got all our senses. So the world's ours. Wake up, girl. Stop dreaming about old dreams. Let's see if we can get busy the few years there are left to us."

"You mean," she said timidly, "for others?"

Winterbourne put his hand in his pocket and grasped his pipe. He held it hard. It seemed to help him, when there were formulated altruisms in the air.

"No," said he, "you bet I don't. I mean, worship the sun when he comes up and thank him when he goes to bed, and read a book and not think so very much about what we wish we had. That's the devil's own work, Cat. It fevers your mind up. If you were nursing children it would make them sick with the taint of it."

She knew that. Her mind, when she mused over what she desired, grew muddy and heaved like an unquiet lake. She looked at him with adoration in her eyes, fear, too, the fear we feel before those we greatly love.

"You show me," she besought humbly.

Winterbourne shook his head.

"No," said he, "I can't. It's unnatural. It's the woman that's got to make the pace. You think it over. You see if it is n't. Now run upstairs. This afternoon we'll have a walk."

She went, without another demanding look at him. Climbing the stairs slowly, she heard Bess moving about in Mrs. Ramsay's room. What did Bess think, she wondered, of

Celia's marriage? She felt something deeply, for her face showed it, but she went about her tasks unchanged. Was that the secret of her power, that she demanded nothing and fed other minds without disturbing them? In her own room Catherine did not throw herself down to rest as she had thought she must. She sat wondering whether, for the first time, she could enter Winterbourne's house of life and live there. She had never for a moment before contemplated that. It had seemed to her that his domain was on the ground floor, where a hundred rude servitors could come in at any minute with their muddy boots. His boots too were muddy, for he was always tramping out into the world and plunging back with its clay upon him. She wanted him to live with her in her tower near the stars, and when he would n't come she cried and ran down to his ground floor to beseech him. But if she loved him, could n't she love him in his own house of life? He would n't climb to hers. And yet, was it climbing? Was she, after all, anything but the harsh creditor who insisted on the fulfilment of a bond? He had said, all those years ago, that he adored her, and she was insisting he should adore her still.

Catherine had to formulate, even now when she had resolved to live and formulate no more. She had to be headlong, too, and because it seemed to her that Bess won love, she would be like Bess. So she dressed carefully, in a shirt waist and short skirt, and trembling a good deal, because she was really tired and not yet less than half an invalid, went downstairs and appeared beside Bess in the dining-room where she was putting a cupboard in order, preparatory to leaving when her chance should come. For Bess suddenly had her plans, and they all had to do with leaving Catherine the sway of her own house, and herself travelling the difficult road that meant becoming a lady

"Bess," said Catherine, "will you give me something to do?"

Bess looked about at her, startled. Then her mind righted itself, understanding that this was one step upward in a sick woman's climb.

"You could sit here and dust these cups," she said. "I'll put them up."

Celia had walked with her husband to their little house, which Mary Manahan had spent the night cleaning and Lovell fastidiously refining in its previous orderly array. He opened the door for her, and she went in. Then the bridegroom's transport of heaven attained came upon him, and he took her in his arms and kissed her. This Celia suffered; but she grew whiter, and, he felt, trembled. That seemed beautiful to him; her remoteness made a part of her charm. But she took off her hat, and began gayly now to play the game of householding here for an interval until the big house should be ready.

Lovell, in a hidden way, was wild with the delight of it. His poor drab life had turned into a miracle. Here was no fruit of effort; he was being surfeited with good fortune big enough for heroes. He had played the coward's part, withdrawn from deeds and the desire of them; but destiny had plucked the golden apple and tossed it down to him. He could do household tasks, and set out their luncheon, laughing at himself for having the wit to do it, — salad and wine and berries, with a cup of coffee after. But he felt no disparagement of his lenten fare. He had lived simply so long that it seemed the most fastidious way, and she, he knew, must be one with him. After luncheon they went into the big house, and she wakened to some real animation over its beauty, the lovely panelling, the perfect consistency of it all. It seemed

to her ready to begin living in at once; but he explained to her the practical needs of a place so long vacant. Then they came back and found the invisible Mary had washed their dishes and again tidied up, and the charm of it began to envelop Celia. It was like living in a fairy house.

They ate their supper, bread and milk, and this frugality Lovell laughed at with no shame, but told her she should have servants as soon as there was room for them. And then, as she sat in her chair by the west window, wondering at the way things were moving, her mind ready to turn hither or yon as the rein of chance should guide it, Lovell came and threw himself on the floor beside her and laid his face upon her knee. He was suddenly, she saw, profoundly moved, and the overwhelmingness of it all came upon her in a rush. He was madly in love with her, and she was his wife. She sat there thinking this, growing cold to her finger-tips, wishing she dared touch his hair, for that would be some sort of answer, and knowing she could not, and suddenly he lifted his ardent eyes to hers. What he saw there sobered him and calmed the transport of possession. She had paled. She trembled. He liked that, because she was to be won. But there was something he did not like.

"What is it, Celia?" he asked her quietly.

She answered at once, in a low voice, without emotion.

"I am afraid."

"Afraid? of what?"

"Of you."

For it had come upon her, sitting there while he trembled with love of her, that she was in the presence of a very big thing indeed. Whatever it might mean to her to be beloved, to him it meant infinitely to love her, and some response was born in her, if only that of wonder and an involuntary respect as at the presence of something incomprehensible. By

a great leap, her mind compassed fealty as something she owed him. He was smiling now, in his lover's confidence.

"You are so beautiful," he said irrationally. "Dearest!" That seemed to him a sufficient answer to her fears. But now he rushed a whole length on his headlong way. "Say you love me," he besought her. "Say the words."

Celia answered instantly, afraid, indeed, to hesitate.

"I can't."

He rose to his knees now and put his arms about her and his face to hers.

"Say it," he commanded. He laughed at the pretty play of it all. "Say you love me."

"I can't," said Celia, in a dull despair. "I don't suppose I do."

He drew back, stung by the lash of it, his face suddenly changed. He got on his feet and took a chair within arm's length of her.

"What is it?" he entreated her, now with a studied and extreme gentleness. "Celia, what's the matter?"

She wrenched the words out and seemed to throw them at him.

"I don't know what love is."

He considered.

"Don't you love your sister?" This he asked her gently, seeking, it seemed, to find the first steps toward leading her in the lovely way she surely meant to go.

A flash came over her face, brightening in the eyes, quivering over the mouth. She was remembering what it is to be condemned by one beloved as she had been by Bess.

"It is different," she managed to say. "She is a girl. You are a man."

"And you don't love me?"

It was not spoken in harshness. She seemed to have

dragged it forth, and he who really knew nothing of her inner mind, could not guess what passion of dawning loyalty toward his love for her lay in the effort she was making to set him right. He got up and walked across the room once and back again. The golden apple had not, it seemed, dropped into his treasury. Destiny was more exact. What he had thought a fairy fortune was nothing but a big challenge over again, and he who had failed a challenge once might be on the verge of double failure. In the midst of his tumultuous passion he had the calm to remind himself of that. He spoke, with a considered quiet.

"Then — why are we here?"

She shook her head, and he waited for her to answer. Suddenly it seemed to her the basest possible deed that she should have taken advantage of his warm belief and that they were here. He was still waiting for her to speak.

"I have treated you," she said in a low voice, "horribly."

Lovell considered. He considered her, her beauty chiefly, which seemed the index of purity alone.

"You puzzle me," he said then, but more, it was evident, to his own mind than to her. There they sat, a world between them, Celia conscious of a stronger emotion than she had ever felt in her life before. Come what would of it, she must not deceive him in the slightest breath. He looked to her entirely unlike the man who had made love to her a week ago. He had become her judge. If she had to pay the penalty of ill deeds, it would be by insisting that he know her fully. It would be tearing down the fabric of his house of life, with hers. Celia had been like Bess, shy in her dreams of what love might be; but now, without warning, the vision of it came upon her and she saw it in its adorable simplicity, its morning tints. She saw herself suddenly as she might have been, a young creature caught up on the wings of a man's

devotion and swept away to an enchanted paradise. But she had manipulated, juggled, and therefore she was jaded before her time. And every minute she grew colder and looked colder also, so that he began, studying her face, to wonder at her.

"Celia," said he, at length, "I can't make you out."

She laughed a little, a note of derision in the sound.

"No," she said. "Shall I tell you? Do you want to know why I am in disgrace with the Winterbournes?"

He considered for a moment. In the first impulse of chivalrous partisanship he had meant not to listen; but she was on a dark road, he saw, where, if he was to carry light, he must be with her.

"I think you 'd better tell me," he said then.

Now it was Celia who deliberated. She could have laughed at the task before her. Again she thought how funny it would be to say, —

"I said I did n't know where an ear-trumpet was. I did know."

She remembered, in the quickness of the mind that heels on great emotion, that Winterbourne had once said we are never angry because of the little thing that sets us off. It is all the accretion of old wrongs. In other homely words, the last straw breaks the back. She had not lied about an ear-trumpet merely. She had seen things as they were and shown them as they were not. She had said, "I love," when she had not loved, and now the swift insistency of the truth eluded her. Best not to meddle with facts, for then would come in the ear-trumpet again and the irony of it.

"I tell lies," said Celia, speaking as simply now as Bess might have done. That was the first step of her calvary. She drew a heavy breath, reflecting that the next one might be easier.

But Lovell was not one inch away from his perplexity. He held out his hands to her.

"Come, Celia," he said. "Come here. It will be easier to talk so."

She shook her head, and he tried argument.

"It is n't a lie that we love each other, is it?"

She could not answer. How did she know now exactly what the truth of this had come to be? He was smiling at her. The beautiful mouth his mother and sister had loved was very sweet.

"Well," said he, "it's true we're married. What did we marry for?"

Celia shook her head.

"I almost don't know," she said, seeking to be exact. "I suppose I wanted to get away — from them."

"Not from Bess?"

"I wanted a home for Bess. I wanted her to stop working — and study — and sing."

"You thought I would give her a home?"

She nodded, not looking at him.

"Well," said Lovell, "I will." He spoke without bitterness, anxious only, it appeared, to get on to matters more immediate to themselves. "How about you, Celia? We won't think about Bess. She shall come to you. How about you? When you married me, didn't you think you — loved me?" He said it humbly, as if, fully as he had believed it to be true, the assurance of it would be incredible.

Celia shook her head.

"How do I know?" she said, and then in a despairing irritability, "Oh, how tired I am!"

Lovell rose at once. He had become the solicitous host. The summer night had been gathering, and now she was little more to him than a voice in the darkness, yet much

more, the warm presence of her, the indeterminate shape toward which all his blood seemed tending. But of this, the compelling power of her, he must not think. He lighted candles now, and in the ray of them she stole a look at him and saw how pale he was and how set his mouth had grown. She had not known in the least what sort of a man it was she juggled with. He began to seem a very potent force indeed. He had taken a candle, and seemed waiting for her.

"Let me show you your room," he said now. "The bedroom there. You must n't be afraid, though it's the ground floor. I shall be out here."

Celia rose wearily. She was stiff with tiredness, and her muscles ached. Midway to take the candle from him, she paused and stretched her arms to heaven, overcome with the contradictions of her lot. She was homesick, and yet she had no home. She was passionately anxious to be loved — was not the vanity Winterbourne had credited her with the obverse side of true desire? — and here was a man who, but a minute ago, had loved her. She wanted with every fibre of her to be approved, and if ever woman had been admired, she had been. Yet it did her no good because she had become hateful to herself. She stood there now looking past him, her great eyes widening.

"The trouble is —" she said.

"Well," said Lovell, "the trouble is?"

The trouble was, her fighting soul was crying, if she had made so many veils between her and the truth, should she ever see it? But she put out her hand and took the candle from him.

"Good-night," she said. The door closed behind her and Lovell went back to the mantel, put out the candles, and sat down in his chair by the window.

And there he sat all night and thought chiefly, it seemed

to him for no reason, of his ancestor, the soldier, whose life had been devoted to a woman — the wife who never left her bed, who was beset with peevishness from the reaction of torn nerves, and to whom he hastened in every absence from affairs, as to the perfect mate. That was love fulfilled. But this, too, was more than the winning of the woman creature, the transcendent bride; it was the challenge of life itself. "I must keep my head," he kept commanding himself above that tumult of the mind. "I must keep my head." But what gibes beset him in the darkness. He was paying penalty, as he always did in actual life, for the creative nature, the seeing eye, the quick comparison, the too responsive nerve. Whatever Lovell might accomplish, he was of those who look upon life, recoil from it perhaps, suffer horribly with what seems at times the disease of it, and recreate it in some form of art. All the phantoms that understand how to rend and tear thronged upon him; here, a thousand voices told him, was another joke on him out of the unexpectedness of the general comedy. He was Time's fool. But a savage conviction had been strengthening in him, in this fallow, silent interval, that it is of no use to see, or even write, if you cannot also get your grip on circumstance, the jade, and whirl her about to be your handmaid. The one real stint is to be a man. And again he told himself "I must keep my head."

XXXIII

CELIA was so tired that she slept all night, waking only once, for a minute or two of homesick terror; but before the mind could rouse itself really, she was off again, and it was the late morning before she woke for good. Then care leaped upon her. Grief had her by the throat, and she succumbed to that sickness of the mind which is the young's own and the old are never likely to feel again, the blessed old who have learned "this too will pass." But here she was, every nerve on fire and her blood hurrying to augment the flame. Something had to be done. As she dressed she thought intently. Nothing, it seemed, would make the place where she found herself in any slight degree better save to take herself away. When she went out, Lovell was waiting, and the table, fastidiously laid, was ready. He turned at once, after their good-morning, to the spirit-lamp, and asked her in the tone of the camping chum how she liked her eggs. She thought she did n't want any; but when she saw him put his in, it seemed to her she did, and he was adroitly ready, timing them.

Then they sat down together, and Celia had no small talk afoot. In the glance she stole at him, she saw his night had not been the truce between miseries that hers had been. He looked jaded. His eyes wore the look of pain. She would have been surprised to know how persistently all night he had been thinking, not of her, but of the desirability that he should not fail. Of his sharp need of her, his sense of outrage at the trick she and fortune together had combined for him, he did not dare, now even at the sight of her, to think.

Lovell had learned that in time of grief you have to husband your power for the actual siege; you have none to spare for fusillades. And over and over again, sitting opposite her at the table, he thought of the old colonel and his chivalric service. But he did talk a little, about the house, and Hopkins, who was a perpetual question-mark, and Celia was grateful to him. And then, breakfast being over, he asked her if she did n't want to go down the brook path behind the house and leave the scene to Mary Manahan. She agreed at once, understanding, from his manner and also from her sense of what must come, that she was to have her trial there.

For Celia now had no idea that she was to escape or that she wished to. Something had got to be done to reconstruct the disorder of her life. Some hidden self was speaking in her, some inheritance from her working ancestors who had bent themselves to bring comeliness out of disarray. They went out together and down the path to the fringing woods, small trees on the border, oaks and birches, and within, a higher knoll where pines began. These had been thinned persistently and with wisdom, so that something great had been attained by tall clean-growing trees with space between. But Lovell chose the little path down to the singing brook, and by its plashy solitude he halted and showed her the seats under trees and asked if they should stay. Celia sat down and began at once, looking up at him with a serious strained face from which consciousness of self and the vanity of beauty's challenge had gone utterly.

"Let's have it over," she said.

"What?" he asked. He, too, seated himself, but where it would not be easy to see her face. He wanted to give her every chance.

"I have got to tell you," said Celia, "everything about me."

"That's as you choose."

"I've got to. Don't tell me I need n't. I must. You don't know me. I wish I could make you. You know Mrs. Winterbourne adopted me."

"Yes."

"She cared a lot about me; but I don't know whether it was about me or because she had to care about something."

"Did you care about her?"

She reflected.

"Yes, at first. But when I began to grow up she wanted me to do things I could n't do."

"What things?"

"She wanted me to be clever, she did n't care how. I had lessons on the piano for years, then the violin. I hated them. I can't play."

There was more bitter feeling in her voice than he had heard in it as yet.

"Poor child!" he muttered. There was relief in pitying her.

"I can sing a little, a very little. She made me have lessons, but I did n't sing well enough, don't you see? She thought I could paint, — I believe she thought I really could do that if I was n't obstinate, — but I could n't. I am stupid, Mr. Lovell. I have no brain."

He was looking at her hand lying on her knee, the delicate white hand that wore his mother's ring. He craved to touch it, and the sickness of the longing made him glad she could not see his face. Celia went on.

"We were thrown all the time with people that could do things, women that write books and talk in public. Once she thought perhaps I could write. I tried everything, to please her. I wanted to, myself. I wanted to be liked. But

I found out one thing. I found it out all of a sudden. I'm not an affectionate person."

This was thrown in with the uplift of a timid question.

"Are n't you?" he asked stupidly from his dream, still thinking of the white hand.

"I feel ever so far away from most people. When they begin to come nearer I don't like it. But I found out if I did n't run away, if I seemed nearer, they liked me. That pleased her. I was popular. She would rather have had me called intellectual; but I could n't be, and so she was glad to have me charming."

"Were they men?" Lovell asked, out of a new pang, "men you charmed?"

"Not so much as women. The women were her friends. That was the way to please her. But she was always studying me and she studied out that, and one day she told me I said I loved people to make them love me, and that when I'd gone away from them I never thought of them again. Well, — I did n't."

"Then —" he reminded her, after too long a pause.

"Then we found Bess." Her voice took on strength and color. "She was my own sister. I'd never had anything my own. She did n't try to make me over. She just liked me and thought I was right. She had her voice, you know, and for a little while I believed that was going to set us at the top of things, where we could be everything mamma expected of us. And mamma wished it — awfully. But she lost money and we had to come down here, and Bess won't sing, can't sing, when you want her to or when it'll do her any good, and I went mad over it, I wanted money so. I knew if we had enough to go away without mamma, we could manage it somehow. I felt I could lead her on to sing, not letting her be watched and driven. I knew she'd sing to

please me. And when I heard of a way to make money, I listened — and if I heard of a person that had money,” — her voice sank here, in shame unbearable, — “I wondered if he would send Bess and me away for her to study, and when she began to sing, then we could pay him back.”

There she paused. This was the story as she knew it. Of the fears upon her lest somehow she had woven a veil about herself through which she could not see the way, and the other almost formless apprehension lest after all she did not care so very much whether a thing were true or false, she did not speak. She could not, indeed, for these things were too subtle for her to formulate. Only dread was upon her lest she had closed doors upon her free spirit, doors that in Bess were open all day long letting in the sun and wind. It was her first view of wilful sin. But, she told herself, when these things set upon her, she had at least begun to care lest they were so. She had seen the face of evil. It had sickened her.

“I see,” Lovell said now, gravely. “Well,” he continued, and there was still no bitterness in his tone, “there is money enough. You and Bess can go away now. You can go abroad.”

“No,” said Celia, “no. I’ve thought it out. I thought it out in a minute last night before I went to sleep. I’ve made a bad start. Don’t men start wrong?”

“Yes. You knew that about me. You knew I’d made a bad start and told me so. It was your sweetness about it that gave me a new chance.”

She shook her head.

“No,” she said, “I did n’t know anything about it.”

“That day I came to see you in the arbor,” he reminded her. He was passionately eager to believe that this at least

had been real among the blossoms that made the garland of his fancy for her crowning.

"No," she said, "I don't remember. Maybe I said I did. Have n't I told you that? You must believe it. Whatever I thought would please you I suppose I did."

Another flower from the garland was torn and ragged at his feet. He almost saw it lying there. But he had made up his mind that come what sad knowledge of her there might, he would not say irrevocable words.

"I'll tell you the story of it," he began. "I'm a disgraced man in a small way. It's only right for you to know."

He told her the story briefly, and she listened.

"No," she said, at the end. "I thought it had something to do with money. Mrs. Ramsay said you had a fortune and would n't use it."

"There's more or less," he said briefly. "I put it away when I took to living here alone. But there it is. It's yours. You shall use it for yourself and Bess."

Two tears ran down her cheeks. She wiped them away, not to be indebted to their dramatic power, and suddenly got up and went to him.

"What shall I do?" she asked him passionately. "What can I do? If there is any decent thing a woman in my place can do, tell me."

He shook his head slightly and looked up at her with a whimsical smile. The irony of it all was strong upon him. Here was the world in summer clothes, here were brooks and birds and the utmost the created scheme could do for joyance. Here were the lover and she, the beloved. What foolish litany of remorse it was to harp upon old sins, past shames, when all the floods of life were mounting. The poet in him longed to break loose, to soar on wings into

the face of the sun; but there was a canker at the heart of life. The beloved did not love him, and there was no upward flight save with her.

"You 'll have to go abroad," he said, seeking dizzily for the commonplace. "You and Bess."

"No," she declared, "no. I won't use your money. I won't use — you."

"I could go with you," he represented again. "You could take me — for a courier."

"No." Then she essayed timidly, "If I could stay here a little, if I could seem to keep your house — then when I went finally — for you must hate me — people won't talk so much. I can't," she cried, "I can't have you ridiculous!"

He drew a quick breath at the respite. It was better to have her so, imprisoned, than to lose her. But he answered only, —

"No, Celia. I don't hate you."

"I could seem to keep your house," she was brooding. "I could learn things from Bess. She knows everything."

He entered into it as if it were a game.

"And the old ladies of Clyde will call upon you and offer you recipes for cake."

The slightest touch of lightness in their story moved him to incredulity that these things could be. There she sat, more lovely than he had ever known her, softer in her reflective mood, a creature fitted for all the needs of life. She was his, so far as outer judgments went, and here it was summer and paradise in the making. Some spell seemed to have made his lovely lady into a changeling. He tried impetuously to recall her.

"Celia, we're under a midsummer madness. Why, you tell me these things as if they were real. They're not. You're the dearest, the loveliest —"

There he stopped, for she looked at him practically and said in a quiet earnest, —

“No, I’m not lovely. I’m a kind of a twisted creature. Bess despises me.”

The look of pain on her face seemed to him more than he could bear.

“No!” he cried hotly.

“Oh, she does n’t even know it, but she does despise me. And I’ve got to make myself all over before I shall stop despising myself. There won’t be time in one life either.”

Her moodiness alarmed him. Then he began to love her without any thought of himself, except now and then when she was so desirable to him that he had to cry for her unreasoningly.

“Celia,” said he. The tone made her look at him. It was full of a gay brightness. “Celia, why don’t we play a little game? We’re two children living in the woods. We’ve run away — from the world because it plagued us.”

She was smiling at him, yet with rueful tear-wet eyes.

“No,” she said. “I can’t play that way. I had to run away from it because I’d been naughty.”

“To tell the truth, then, so did I. So here we are. We both know just how naughty we’ve been, but it’s nobody’s business but our own.”

“Are you going to be as nice to me as that?” she asked him.

“Just that nice,” he said. “We’re two children in the woods. And we can’t talk about grown-up things because we don’t know the grown-up language. We’ve left all that behind us.”

Celia had risen. She stood looking at him, something vivid in her face.

“If I had a brother,” she said then, “I’d like him to have been like you.”

This was wormwood, but it was a part of the bitter course. Lovell gulped upon it, and then made his answer : —

“Let's go home now and see about dinner.”

She caught his spirit gayly. To her also it seemed incredible that last night's tragedy should have dawned into this garden day.

“Don't we dig roots and things?” she asked.

“No, for there's the wigwam. It'll have something bubbling in the pot. You'll see.”

So she walked before him in the path when it was narrow, and then beside him where there was room for two, and he prophesied how Mary Manahan, the invisible, would have become fired to wondrous acts with culinary needs upon her. Hammering, that cheerful sound if the heart beats with it, was going on in the big house. They stopped there for a ten minutes' oversight, and Hopkins met them with bluff good-humor to ask a dozen questions, and refer matters to the new mistress. The workmen, men of Clyde all of them, who had known Lovell from his school-days, glanced up at her with a keen neighborly look to see what manner of woman she was.

It left her with a quickened heart. The day went on with its little cares, and Lovell asked her this or that, as if her will were in the thing he sought. Toward night again she turned to him wildly when they had talked of everything he could bring her to decide about the house.

“We can't keep on like this,” she said.

“You hate it so?”

He was less tense than she because he was more tired. The burden of the whole was his. She was letting herself sink more and more into the pit of remorse to fulfil her punishment. It was his task to upbear her. She shook her head.

"No. It's not discontent. It's because I ought never to have come."

They stood looking at each other across the little distance between them, the chasm of separated lives. Lovell was thinking, with a grim grip on facts as he had them. He wanted to refer this case to life, the big tribunal of things as they are. Did it do any good to persuade a woman to love you if the primal spring of it is not within her? Yet she loved Bess. Now she showed what she had been thinking.

"Bess has not come to see me."

Her mouth drew miserably as she said it. Her eyes looked piteously at him. Lovell called upon his inner adjudicator again to help him keep his head.

"Don't you know why?" he asked her, and in spite of himself his smile was bitter. "She thinks we are too happy."

"Too happy!"

"Nobody would run in upon a bride and groom until they gave some hint they were to be found."

"You don't think it's because she despises me?"

Lovell, obeying the impulse that seemed to him sanest because it was the biggest, suddenly took her by the shoulders and gave her a little shake.

"Celia," said he, as brusquely as he would, "if you were a child, I'd have you whipped." Then before she had got over the surprise of it, he took his hands away, and laughed, with a tender mirth, too, because she seemed to him so dear and small. "You're such a simpleton! Here's this solid earth, and you act as if we were on an egg-shell, and you were being hunted to death by bogies."

She came a step nearer him, and whispered, —

"Do you think I have hurt my brain? She said so once. She thought she never talked to me about the things she

saw in me; but it was n't so. She said if I said I liked what I did n't like, by and by I should n't know what I liked myself."

"Then by George," said Lovell, "I hope it's so. You said last night you did n't like me. Perhaps you don't know. Perhaps you're in love with me. Perhaps you adore me, sweetest, as I do you. I do, Celia, I do. Understand that. Remember it, too, my girl."

She looked at him, fascinated, the warm kindliness of his face, the mouth that encouraged, the eyes that beckoned. She felt pride in him, and Lovell was clever enough to see she liked him better so than mawkishly undone for her.

"There's one thing I won't stand," said he, — "I won't live in a spider's web of casuistry. I know all that kind of thing. I can do it better than you can. You've got to be a good girl, a plain, nice, good girl. Now, see here: Mary Manahan is n't coming to-night. I told her not to. You put on an apron and wash the dishes."

"I have n't any apron," said Celia faintly.

"Then you take a towel and pin it round you. I've seen Mary Manahan do it when she forgot her apron. I'm going over to shut up the house. Hopkins has n't any key."

He walked out and left her, and Celia, in a daze, did as she was told, and when he came back, cheer on his lips and terror in his heart for fear he had lost her, she was sitting with folded hands waiting for him.

"You are very patient with me," she said, at once. "Remember, it won't last long. I'm not going to stay."

Lovell walked up to her and stood there, making himself as immovable within as he hoped he looked in his bodily estate.

"We'll have that out now," he said. "You're not going to leave me."

"Not going to? Not if I —"

"Not if you think you want to. You're going to stay right here. And before we get through with each other you're going to love me with all your heart and soul and body —" She put up her head at that, and the lightning of fear shot over him lest he had offended — "as I do you," he ended, in a way that shut her lips.

"One thing," she essayed, — "Bess is not going to take money from you."

"Perhaps not. That's for her to say."

"No. It's for me. To have you think I did it for that —"

"You told me you did — but never mind."

"And then to have it succeed — to make use of you — I should kill myself."

She looked wild-eyed now, and he wondered whether he was pressing her too far.

"We don't kill ourselves," he said coldly, "if we're well-bred people. We play the game."

At this she stiffened perceptibly.

"And a part of the game," he went on — "Do you mind?" He got up and took his pipe. She shook her head and Lovell began to smoke. He did it very seldom, sometimes not for weeks together, but it seemed to him a helpful stage accessory at the moment, — "a part of the game until we move into the other house where there's room for help, is doing what work Mary Manahan can't get round to. I'll see to Hopkins. You see to the house."

The tone, not the words, struck fire from her.

"You speak to me," she said hotly, forgetting her established despair, "as if I were a squaw."

Lovell puffed a moment, and held down the beautiful words beginning with "liege-lady" that came running in, a

lovely troop, to assure him they were there and ready to be used. "Do I?" said he. "Maybe."

But immediately on the heels of that he had a page to read her of Winterbourne's translation, not saying the English words were his, and she quieted under the lovely flow of it. But she rose early and took her candle. He had put aside his pipe.

"Wait," he said.

She had turned away with her good-night. She looked soft-eyed and sad. He held out his hand, and at the instant saw the little warning thrill in her, a start away from him.

"No," said he. "Don't be afraid." Then she looked at him and he took her hand and they stood facing each other. "Don't think of that again," said Lovell, as if it were a command.

"What?" she asked faintly.

"Don't think I'm going to kiss you. I never shall — not till you want me to. Good-night."

She left him to his dreams, his waking ones, for tired as he was he could not sleep at once. All manner of his long-loved desires had been resurrected in him — the great colony known as youth. She would have wondered, if she could have seen them thronging, there were so many and of such brave array. Old stories, chivalry and faerie, romance of love and death, contributed their names. He was in a state of quickened life. For the body and its demands, crudely deified by materialists, he did not at that moment care a straw. He wanted his wife, the soul of her, the ultimate essence, not possession, against a will not with him. He saw the vision as romance saw it imperfectly, and as he had forgotten to see it while he minded his book in these lethargic days. The poets even were there. They thronged about

him, bidding him remember. What should he remember? The binding of the bride to the saddlebow by his arm and his blended will, the quest that he should be brave and true. And to that end, he bade himself sleep, to wake on the morrow a sane man.

XXXIV

BESS sought out Winterbourne in his seclusion by the window where he sat, omitting to light his lamp, and thought. She looked, in the dusk, subdued and drooping. A part of her cares were over, for Mrs. Ramsay had gone home.

"Sit down, child," said Winterbourne.

But she continued to stand, her hands clasped before her rather like a suppliant.

"Do you think, sir," she said, "I might go and see her to-morrow?"

"Who? Mrs. Ramsay?"

"No, sir, — Celia."

"Why not, for heaven's sake?"

"She might n't want me. If she is so happy, will she want me?"

The tone was profoundly sad. Winterbourne had an instinct that he'd better tell her a story as he did the children when they looked like tears. But there was no story except, in a metaphor he chose to use for himself, that he meant presently to have a duel with his wife from which one or both of them would not return.

"Of course," he said. "Go and see her by all means. Go to-morrow morning. Bess, are you tired out?"

She looked at him in a clear-eyed honesty.

"No, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Ramsay's off, at least. Bess, what is to become of that woman? Is she going batting round same as ever and let her children run to weed?"

Bess considered.

"I guess she's thought a good deal about the children while she could n't see 'em," she confessed. "She never saw 'em much before, except morning and night. She did n't sense how dirty they were."

"And yet," he rallied her, "you want to vote. Hunter says you do. Don't you see what it makes of a woman to hurl herself about trying to vote and putting her finger in every individual pie and leaving her own pie unbaked?"

"Well," said Bess practically, "if Mrs. Ramsay could vote, she would n't have to take so much time trying to. She could just go and do it, same as men do, and then spend the rest of the day at home, same as men do in their offices. That's all."

Winterbourne stared at her and then threw back his head and laughed.

"Excellently reasoned, wench," said he. "And now, how about your own career? The last time you mentioned it a man had asked you to marry him, and you concluded with a form of logic I can't follow, that you were going to make yourself into a kind of a creation—a wedding-cake affair—something called a lady. Was that it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, Bess, what is a lady? Do you want to be like Mrs. Ramsay?"

No, she did n't. From her face that was plain.

"Do you want to be like Celia?"

There, though she flushed and looked imploring as if begging him to leave her darling uncriticised, she would say nothing, and he knew he should gain no more by using Catherine for a standard.

"Now, Bess," said he, "what's all this about being a

lady? Sit down, or I shall have to get up. If you 're going to be one, I've got to treat you scrupulously."

So she sat down.

"I don't even use good grammar," she said, in her old formula and with a shamed eloquence of look.

"The mischief you don't! What else?"

She put out her hand and laid it on his page.

"I can't read your books."

"Well, if you 'd lived fifty years ago, you 'd have been unladylike if you could. That's Greek, simpleton. You can read English, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I do when I get a chance."

"Now what do you read, Bess?" he asked, with curiosity. "What are your books?"

She hung her head.

"I don't like most things, sir," she said. "That's the trouble. I like — poetry."

"God save you, child, you like poetry? Where 'd you get it?"

"There were some books at the sanatorium. I read them when I swept the room."

"When she swept the room! Hear her, gods, the little slavey! Well, whose poems were they? Mr. Longfellow's?"

"No, sir. They were there, too. But there were some I read more. I could have read them all night."

"Whose were they?"

"His name was Keats — John Keats."

Winterbourne could have cried over her, she seemed so exquisitely and particularly the child of his own spirit.

"Bess," said he, "do you suppose you want to be a learned pig?"

She understood him absolutely. That was her way with

him. The words might be uncouth or foreign to her, but she always caught their meaning. It was like a signal code.

"I want," said she, groping for an answer, "I want to do the best I can."

He, in his turn, understood. Was it not another version of Jean Paul's "I have made what I could of the stuff"? He got up. His eyes were wet.

"Good-night, child," he said. "Go and find your sister in the morning. I've got a lamp somewhere. I'll rub it up, and we'll see."

The next morning, by the light of day with no glamour in it, he went to his wife's chamber. It was to be what he had been calling, in his mind, his duel with her. She sat there by the window, trig and fine in her short dress, ready, he guessed, for him to ask her to go out a pace. She was pale, her face looked harried, and she was evidently having distressing thoughts. But they were of Celia, not of him.

"John," she said at once, "what made her do it? In that way, that horrible, uncouth way? What made her?"

Winterbourne drew up a chair and sat down by her.

"Let Celia be," he said. "She's gone into another wigwam. She's not our business any more."

"She's my responsibility—"

Winterbourne leaned forward and looked her in the face.

"Catherine," said he, "pay attention to me. I've come to propose to you."

The homely phrase arrested her. The color came, and she waited with parted lips.

"I want to propose to you," said he slowly, to give her time, "to go on pilgrimage with me."

"With you?" She was more than ready.

"I want you to go abroad with me, for six months, a year perhaps."

"We two alone?"

"No. I intend to take Dwight Hunter. I intend taking Bess."

She could not make out the combination, nor did he mean she should. He simply meant to tear out his own roots from the earth they were delighting in, and give himself to the wind of destiny for the sake of something other than himself.

"Catherine," said he, "there's lots I've got to say to you. I don't know how. We've come together again. It's by your will. I suppose we shall stay together. That'll be by mine. By mine distinctly. But we've got to be good fellows. We've got to let youth have its way about us." She opened her lips to say, "I don't feel old," but he forestalled her:—"You're not old. I'm not either, though I'm a thousand years older than you are. But spring won't come again. Don't you see, we have one day of life. Dawn won't come again. But midday's here. It's the edge of the afternoon. The sun is n't in our eyes as it was in the morning. We've got to see things as they are. And we'll see 'em together, if you agree, like good soldiers. Will you, old friend?"

No one but the woman who has been worshipped and cannot resign her sovereignty knows the bitterness of being called to action when she is listening to be wooed to love. But there was no doubt that, in spite of all her clamoring, he, as he was, was dear to her. Not knowing him yet, very well, she had the luck to recognize in this his call to her, the last one perhaps he would ever give, and, unless she would lose him utterly, to be in some form accepted. And she gave herself as entirely as the bride, and as ignorantly. But she had the one inevitable question:—

"John, is it for Bess?"

He answered instantly.

"Yes. Not to form her, not to pester her. Let her alone. Let her sing or not sing. Give her her head. Are you up to that?"

Yes, she was up to that. She was up to anything he chose to ask of her. So high was the thought of the quest in her that she was abjuring the old jealousies.

"And we can't travel like royalty," he said. "But you shall be comfortable. There's enough for that. And we'll come back here after, and maybe I can buy an annuity for you—for maybe the gods—" He paused there, but he had thought for one hopeful moment that the gods might draw him elsewhere to a kinder quest.

He got up, bent over her in a courtly way and kissed her hand. And though he left her gravely, Catherine, sitting there with the delight upon her of doing his will, felt happiness come flooding in.

Winterbourne gave himself no time to reconsider. He went at once to find Dwight Hunter, at home and fuming because some man summoned had not appeared. Dwight looked harassed, angry like a nervous animal, and his boots were caked with soil. Winterbourne began on him at once:—

"Dwight, we're going abroad, my wife and I."

Dwight stood still, and looked at him, a question intensifying his face.

"She'll be with Celia?" he managed.

"She's going with us."

Rage leaped into his eyes, but he said nothing.

"This is what I want," said Winterbourne. He was overawing him by the direct glance, as he had overawed his wife. "I want you to throw over your dickering—throw it on Lovell's shoulders. It'll be good for him. He's a poet. He's elected to be a greasy citizen. And I want you to go with us."

Hunter kept on staring at him. He could not believe it. "You fool!" Winterbourne broke out, "don't you see what I'm offering you? I'm going to give her a holiday, but you — don't you see, you dolt, the part you're cast for? Italy, man, and if you can't turn her head in Italy, you're a jackass and don't deserve her." He flung himself about and was striding off. He heard the heavy boots behind him. "Take it or leave it," Winterbourne called. He was in a blind rage at life for constraining him to go on pilgrimage again and drag these impedimenta. "You've had the offer. Take it or leave it."

Hunter's hand was on his. Winterbourne stopped to grip it, and then looked into the young face and saw it glowing. "When do we sail?" asked Hunter.

But what did Bess say when she was told the door had opened to her? She was all dressed conformably in crisp things, ready, even he could see, to make the call her sister would commend.

"Bess," said he, "you're going abroad in a few weeks, you and my wife and Dwight Hunter and I."

He thought he had never seen eyes widen so startingly. The rosy color poured into her face, and she was living beauty. But what she said was this, —

"We can't all go. Who'll get in the carrots?"

Winterbourne beat the ground with his stick and wanted to yell in pure delight.

"And she can't go," said Bess firmly, "until she's seen a doctor."

"Seen a doctor? You young filibuster, you're her doctor and she's getting well."

"Oh, no, I ain't," said Bess wisely. "I should n't think of taking her off so far unless a doctor said we could."

"You don't believe in doctors."

"Oh, yes, I do. Only if she'd had one then, she'd have settled right down on him."

How did she know Catherine so well, he wondered, the abandon of her rush, the intense conviction with which she would have become an invalid?

"So you had your doctor round the corner, you quack, taking the bread out of his mouth and ready to put your hand on him if you needed him?"

"Yes, sir," said Bess absorbedly. "But you call him in now. You ask her to see him. He'll tell her she can go." She walked away a step on her errand, and then turned and came back to him. "What's Dwight Hunter going for?" she asked abruptly.

"He's going to tug your shawl-strap," — shawl-straps were much used when he had gone before, — "and leave me a hand to carry my wife's. I'm going to make him into a slavey for the whole of us. He's young and I'm old. Don't you ever forget your daddy's old."

What she was thinking he did not know, but in a moment her face cleared.

"Well," she said conclusively, "it'll do him good. Maybe he won't stay with us long."

Then she went on to Celia, who saw her coming and waited for her in the doorway. Celia had been alone most of the morning, peeping into her trunks, wondering what she should do with her things, whether she should unpack them, as she had done by the more delicate, or assume she was going away. She waited for Bess now in a great longing and excitement. Bess, she knew, would make all well. There would be no secrets between them, now things had gone so far, no pretences that the present state was not all misery. Yet when Bess came up the steps, her eager face alight, Celia

forgot she could throw herself into her arms and sob out her sorrows there. She did kiss her sister tenderly, but she suddenly seemed to herself a different person. Was it partisanship of Lovell because she was in his house, and it was only decent to be loyal to him? Whatever it was, there was something immutably fixed in her to keep the curtain before his ignominy of living with an alien wife. They went into the house, hand clasped in hand, and Celia, not knowing what she was about to say, ventured, —

“The other house is getting on.”

“Do you like it, dear?” Bess asked her tenderly. It seemed wonderful to her to find Celia’s mind fixed upon houses and furnishings.

“It’s very pretty. Yes, it’s lovely. It’s so big and old.”

“Shall you have dotted muslin?”

“Dotted muslin?”

“Yes, for curtains. It always seemed to me the prettiest that ever was.”

Celia determined, in a rush, that if she stayed to order curtains, they should be dotted. Then Bess told her news, and Celia sat and looked at her. It was incredible. Bess was going abroad, and Celia was not giving it to her, nor was there mention of her going too. How should there be? Here she was in her house of life. Who would think of dragging her out of it to lesser than the ecstatic joys that dwell in married love? But because Bess knew no more about plans and seasons, they talked of other things, — of housekeeping and little practical ways Celia had never conceived of until here was a home of her own and the care of it. When Bess rose to go, she stood a moment, daring something. Then she said, —

“Had n’t you better run round and see her pretty soon?”

Celia looked unmoved. She was not conscious of wanting to see Catherine.

"She's fond of you," Bess insisted.

Celia's eyebrows gloomed. She seemed to be thinking back over an unkindly time.

"I'll come," she said then. "Yes, I'll come."

They kissed, and Bess went away, and Celia sat with idle hands, thinking. It was about Bess. The distinction of her, the difference between her and the crying, whining world, was that she did something all the time. She set her hand to things. It evidently was the way to keep alive. Then Lovell came, hot and dishevelled. He had been working at the house with the men, to speed things on the faster. It was twelve o'clock and Mary Manahan had not appeared. Lovell had met her in the road. She had been sent for, to see a sister come from far to spend the day.

"And there's no dinner," Celia said, aghast.

"There's bread," said Lovell, "milk, cold meat. Buck up, squaw, and eat what there is in the wigwam."

And Celia laughed. The sound of it, free, unconsidered, threw him off his seat of self-control. He wanted to ask her if she could do it again, perhaps, if he would give himself to witticism as choice. But she was spreading the cloth, and he would not hinder her.

"Bess was in," she said. Ah, that was why she looked so happy. "She's going abroad."

"She? Who else?"

She told him.

"You'll want to go, Celia," said Lovell soberly. The light had gone out, for him. He felt tired.

"No," she said. She was pouring milk into the glasses.

"Here, don't you give me all the cream. I like it pale. You can go, Celia. You shall."

She heartened herself to glance at him.

"You want me to?"

He would not answer that.

"What did Bess think?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About you. What it's best for you to do."

She turned to him now in what seemed a raging pride.

"Bess? I shouldn't ask Bess. Do you think I'd tell Bess any of the things you're — suffering?"

She went tremblingly about her tasks and Lovell dared not look at her lest the pathos and loveliness of her undo him quite and make him spoil the good begun. By and by she stopped and surveyed the table with an anxious care.

"Do you think," she appealed to him, "do you think that's right?"

Lovell made himself answer soberly, —

"Yes. Looks to me all right."

XXXV

IT was on a day at the end of the hurried weeks before the Winterbournes' sailing that Lovell came into the little house to tell Celia the big one was finished. She sat there by the window — for it was in the first warmth of September, when you could not get too much of summer going — and read in a small green book. This, as he entered, she dropped at her side, but he knew the cover. The poems were his, and this was the first time Celia was really reading them. She looked at him differently, he thought, with a question unexpressed.

"What are you thinking?" he asked her. He sat down on the other end of her couch and gazed at her with tired eyes. The house was done. Hopkins and his neighborly men had gone. Paint would need more drying, but it would not be long before life could begin there. But of what complexion it would be, neither of them knew. "What were you thinking?" Lovell asked.

She drew her brows together slightly. He saw, as he had lately, with a pang, that she considered carefully before she spoke, and spoke exactly. Did she think herself a subject for morbid psychology? That was too cruel.

"I've been thinking I don't know you," she said.

The answer to that was, "And I don't know you." But he said, —

"Nobody knows anybody except in two ways."

"What are they?"

"Likeness — or passionate love."

She pondered that for a moment.

"There's sympathy," she said timidly, because he seemed to her so much cleverer than she.

"Passionate love is sympathy — the *n*th power." He took the book from her hand and furled leaf after leaf and hooted at it all. Then he shut it and threw it on the floor. "Poor young devil!"

"Why?"

"Because he thought the world was his."

"And was n't it? Why was n't it?"

"He turned coward. He lost his grip."

Celia had a swift vision of the calmness of his binding her down to a sane life with him, and, without violence of command, forcing her acquiescence.

"You have n't lost your grip on me," she wanted to say, and dared not, knowing she could not foresee the answer to that. "But you've got your grip again?" she hesitated.

He shook his head.

"Do you know what I was then?" He gave the book on the floor a tap with his foot. "I was young."

"But you're young now."

There were maternal stirrings in her, desires that he should be assuaged and comforted. Her eyes were dewy as they looked on him, but that he did not see. He was not meeting her eyes, these days, being plainly afraid of the shock and surprise of orbéd splendor under their fringing shade.

"I don't mean years," he said. "It's something else. When you're really young you — walk in beauty. The smoke out there — that fall look over the hills and river — that's sacrificial smoke rising to the Most High. And the gods — Winterbourne's gods — are all about, and the Most High sits up there above them to make it right, and does n't care which we worship because it's all one." He seemed to

be speaking now out of a dream of the smoky day, the mist in his eyes, and speaking, he half felt, to Winterbourne, who understood things so and who let himself loose to talk in just this way. How Winterbourne had led him! until he turned away for this paradise of a woman's eyes. "And the woman you love," he went on drunkenly, beguiled by the silence and the slumbrous haze, "you see her through veils. She is the hidden, the unapproachable —"

Celia got noiselessly on her feet. She could not bear it, the sharp wonder of hearing him tell what the woman should be and she was not. Lovell, too, came awake, and passed a hand over his eyes. But the dream was not over. "She looks to him —" he went on, trying to recapture that vision of the bending, floating other than himself which himself had inevitably to pursue — "she looks —"

Now he was on his feet staring at her, and Celia looked at him in flooding prayer that whatever ill he saw in her he would not tell her. And Lovell saw in her that she longed only to be his handmaid, and yet here was his decreed lady. "She looks," he said, while his hands found her, "she looks like you."

That night it was that Winterbourne went to see the children for the last half-hour. But they were in bed, all but Tonty, who knew he would come, and had slipped into her little wrapper and run down to the nursery, where she sat watching. Mother, too, was in bed. She spent a great many hours there, but between times she was on one domestic raid after another, drilling the children and the new cook in the minutiae of life, but pleasing them on the whole because, though exacting and terribly clear-sighted, she was calm and kind. Winterbourne came in softly. He would have come earlier save that he wanted the decks clear of Mrs. Ramsay,

and he knew Tonty would be waiting. In a moment they were established, he in the big chair, and she, now there were no smaller ones to favor, in his arms, his cheek against her silky head.

"Timmy's going to school," said she.

"Where?" asked Winterbourne.

"Mother found her wedding-skirt all sewed over with flowers, and she's sent him to the art school."

"Will Timmy like it?"

Tonty did n't know. She had an impression that it would mean the safety of bits of silk and cushions. They would n't be sewed over with flowers any more.

"Tonty," said Winterbourne, "you know I'm going to sea. I'm going to be the Flying Dutchman."

"Oh!" she cried. She knew that story, and it troubled her on a windy night.

"Don't you fret," said Winterbourne, seeing he had chosen ill. "There is n't any Dutchman. It's only a reincarnation myth."

"Oh!" said Tonty, quite satisfied: for though she might be staggered at long words, the tone he put them in assured her they were innocuous.

"Tonty," said Winterbourne, "I'll tell you a little mite of a story. Once there was a boy named Jackie. And he had two little girl-children. One was named Tonty and one was named Bess."

"Me?"

"You? I should say not. Much nicer!"

But she knew.

"And one walked on one side of him and held his hand, and the other walked on the other side of him and held his hand. And lots of other children held on to him, some to his coat-tails and some to his arms, and some sat on his feet

and he could hardly walk. But he knew he'd got to walk." He stopped here, musing. The vision of the endless road was strong upon him. If he could say, "This is my life and I've lived more than half of it, well or ill. I won't trouble myself about the rest!" But it was all going to be his life, the whole endless road, and if he stopped here and sat down under a tree, it would only mean so many steps not done. "He had a lot to carry," said Winterbourne pathetically, humorously too. "He'd got his father and his grandfather and his great-grandfather, and so many more they made a pile sky-high. And some of 'em that clung to his elbows were heavy as lead. But the two little girls that held his hands —"

"Me."

"And Bess. They each carried a little lantern, and that lighted the way. So he set out quite bravely, and the two little girls carried the lanterns splendidly —"

"Did they go out?" Tonty asked, with an anguished apprehension. "Oh, did mine go out?"

"No, sir! They burned forever and ever. Lanterns never really go out. Don't you forget that."



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